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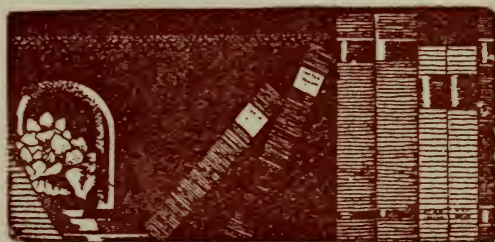
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END OF DREAMS

(A Novel Of New England)

by

Philip Jerome Cleveland



THE INGLAND CO., PUBLISHERS
BROOKLYN — CONNECTICUT

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This Volume is
Affectionately Dedicated To
MY FOUR CHILDREN
With the Fervent Prayer That As They Mature
They Will, By God's Grace,
Be Permitted To Avoid That Tragic Place
Where So Many Have Fallen—
END OF DREAMS

OTHER VOLUMES BY THE AUTHOR

BEAUTY'S PILGRIM; A Portrait Of Jesus

HER MASTER; A Religious Romance

INTRODUCING

END OF DREAMS

This Book was not written casually or heatedly. It has grown from long-interred seed that germinated suddenly and in most bewildering manner. A strange, surprising harvest from almost forgotten seed. The story is wholly fictional as to names, in characterization and romantic development. The writer has listened to many narratives told by those who got, finally, to an end of dreams. Only the irrepressible urge and voice of Truth could justify the presentation of such a volume from a scion of the Church. Only the desire to have Christendom purged, so as by fire, and restored to "the simplicity that is in Christ" could have driven the writer to launch this craft, with its queer, assembled cargo. Only the belief that our wistful and lovable young are in need of help, sympathy and understanding everywhere and in every field of life, could have made him decide to hazard this new, untried craft on the tremendous, far-sounding waters

PRESENTATION

This Book is presented to all city dwellers who love the country; to all country folk who enjoy as well as till their fields; to the uncomplaining toilers of the sea; to honest, genuine church people who daily pray for a purer Christianity for the life of today; as a rebuke to the selfish and hard-boiled style of religious devotee; as a warning to those who have never learned to appreciate youth and beauty; as a love-gift to folks who like to read books; commissioned abroad with the hope that truth, kindness and the heart's highest affairs will be advanced in the earth.

THE CHAPTERS

Book I. Dreams of Youth

- Chapter 1 Polish Wedding
- Chapter 2 Tryst With Beauty
- Chapter 3 Listening In
- Chapter 4 Midnight Visitor
- Chapter 5 Snow Scene
- Chapter 6 Choir Practice
- Chapter 7 Horse-Fly
- Chapter 8 Afternoon Call
- Chapter 9 Not For Sale
- Chapter 10 Day Dreams
- Chapter 11 Money Matters
- Chapter 12 To Market
- Chapter 13 Hillside House

Book II. Swift Crushed To Earth

- Chapter 1 Sacrament
- Chapter 2 Eyes To See
- Chapter 3 Repercussion
- Chapter 4 Annual Meeting
- Chapter 5 To Windward
- Chapter 6 Crisis
- Chapter 7 Sunday Afternoon

- Chapter 8 Carnival
- Chapter 9 Grove Of Pines
- Chapter 10 Poor Man's Hotel
- Chapter 11 Bonfire
- Chapter 12 This Last Anchor
- Chapter 13 One Thing More

Book III. May Rise Again

- Chapter 1 Beginning Again
- Chapter 2 Exquisite Moment
- Chapter 3 Brief Respite
- Chapter 4 Street Meeting
- Chapter 5 Restless Sea
- Chapter 6 Sea Drift
- Chapter 7 Becalmed
- Chapter 8 Toilers, Dreamers
- Chapter 9 Day To Day
- Chapter 10 Wedding Night
- Chapter 11 Moonlight
- Chapter 12 Unwarranted Intrusion

Book IV. Re-Born To Beauty

- Chapter 1 A Letter
- Chapter 2 The Night Cometh
- Chapter 3 Hour Of Judgment
- Chapter 4 At Sunrise Every Soul
- Chapter 5 Lead, Kindly Light
- Chapter 6 Hope Springs Eternal

BOOK ONE:

DREAMS OF YOUTH

POLISH WEDDING

Gilbert, upstairs in the manse, was making preparations for the church wedding, scheduled for another hour. Many thoughts whirled disconnectedly through his mind as, half consciously, he commenced changing raiment.

There was the shuffling, disturbing sound of feet on the front porch, the precise ringing of the bell.

He heard Evelyn downstairs, hurrying along the hallway, from the dining room to the front door.

Excited voices were mingled.

Evelyn's short, swift footfalls echoed again in the hallway, this time to the stairway. He would know her step anywhere.

"Gil! Gil!" she called. "Can you come down? Nan and Mazie can't get into the church. It's locked!"

"Locked?" he cried in nervous excitement. "Locked?" His tone became sharper. His voice swept through the bedroom doorway, a little open. Hastily Gilbert drew on his shirt, tie, vest and clattered down the stairs.

The two girls in the front room became vociferous at once.

"The church is locked. We left our flowers on the church steps. We got to get the vases, water, arrange the flowers—and everything! People will be coming soon—and the church isn't unlocked!"

"Did you try all the doors?"

"Yes, even the cellar."

"See anything of Mr. Purdy about?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, here's a pretty mess—the wedding in an hour and the church locked. I'll have to hurry over to Purdy's at once!"

An auto chugged laboriously up the circuitous, sloping driveway. Gilbert swept a glance out the window. He recognized auto and occupant.

"Go back to the church. I'll be there in ten minutes." The pastor dashed from the house.

"Heh! Lew! Lew!"

Gilbert rushed over to the car, the radiator steaming, the motor shaking the body, rattling the fenders.

"What's the excitement? House afire?"

Lew O'Brien, farmer of sixty-two, Irishman from Ulster, smoking his inseparable corn-cob, pulled up the brake and snapped off the ignition.

"Don't do that!" Gilbert cried. "We've got to go!"

"Go somewhere? I just got here."

The quiet grey eyes scanned the excited minister's flushed face.

"Gad! You look like you was drunk! Celebratin' the doin's aforehand. A great dominee, you are!" A long, muffled chuckle.

"I'm not fooling, Lew, honest. You've got to drive me to Purdy's place at once."

"S'matter? Janitor slippin'?"

"I should say he was. Didn't open the church. Wedding's in an hour."

"Anybody tell him about it?"

"Of course. I gave it out among the notices Sunday. He was there. He knows his duties."

"Reckon he slipped up today. But—get in!"

Lew adjusted the throttle and gas, slid from his seat, reached for the crank on the car-floor, moved leisurely about to the front of the machine, cranked the engine, hurried back, readjusted the feed to better advantage, arched up into the seat, paused to light his pipe again, then turned the machine jerkily about and poked from the yard. In two minutes the car was brought to a noisy standstill.

"Want me to wait?" Lew questioned.

"Of course. I've got to get the keys and get back to the church quick as I can."

Gilbert knocked on the front door of a small brown cottage, then raced to the back door. Mrs. Purdy stood in the doorway.

"Where's Mr. Purdy?"

"Suspect he's in the garden. Was—a minute ago. Diggin' spuds."

"Thanks."

Gilbert caught sight of a thin, bony figure in the back yard, garden-spade in hand, one foot and a hand sending it deep into the clod.

"Mr. Purdy!"

The figure moved, disclosing a grey, rigid face, smooth-shaven, a large head, out of proportion to the gaunt, scraggly frame. The nose was unusually wide and the lips seemed to reach from ear to ear. That was the first impression one got.

"Why isn't the church unlocked?"

"Is this the day?"

"Of course. Nan and Mazie have been up there a half hour. Couldn't get in."

"Too bad. What time's the weddin'?"

"Less than an hour."

"Wall, won't need no fire enyhow. Mild day fer September. Didn't have no orders to build one enyhow."

"Why, Mr. Purdy, I gave out the notice Sunday."

"But I didn't get no orders from the Board." The man, holding two fingers to his nostrils, bent awkwardly over and violently cleared both nostrils into the ground.

"You don't need any."

"Sure do, fer a Polak weddin'. Never had one afore. Such doin's as that require a special vote."

"Who said that?"

"Elder Swartwood and old man Rutgers, and me own Nellie, senior. Seein' as they're the Board I didn't dare go agin 'em."

"When did all this happen?"

"Sunday morning after meetin'. Said a Polak weddin' was goin' too fur. Let 'em go somewhere else to git spliced."

"But they're a fine couple, Anzelm and Anna. I gave Anzelm painting lessons. That's what got him interested in religion. They attend church, both of them."

"Prehaps. But ain't they Poles? They ain't Americans, are they?"

"Yes. Both born here. American citizens."

"But they be Poles, too. Our church ain't fer them kind."

"We're wasting time, Mr. Purdy. I'd like to have the keys of the church." The pastor shoved out a hand.

"By whose say-so?"

"My own."

"Not by the Board's?"

"By my own. And I demand them now! Hurry up!"

"Don't know as I oughter." One hand still rested on the spade's handle. "Rutger's'll give me hell if I fetch 'em over without the Board's say-so."

"I demand the church keys, Mr. Purdy!" The lips were tightly drawn, the eyes full of passionate meaning. Purdy ventured a glance into them, then decided to let go of his farm implement.

"Wall, prehaps I'd better, to save a scene. But let me tell ye, young feller, Rutgers'll pitch into me fer this."

"Send him to me."

Slowly Purdy surrendered the keys, with much sighing and groaning. The moment they were in his hand the pastor raced back to the steaming auto.

"Got 'em, eh?" Lew observed. "Takes you, don't it?"

"I'd have had them or we'd have forced the doors open."

"Full of pep now. But the world will take a heap of it out of you. Mark me. I know." Lew cranked the car again, struck a match on his pants and once more nosed the car up the road.

"Don't know this town yet. Not by a jugfull! Human nature, it's ornery stuff. Thats why I wouldn't even join a church. Always in a wrangle about somethin' er other—the choir, the music, the dominee, money er somethin'. I come, and Flossie. But to join? Not by a jugfull! I stay home, mind my business and live in peace."

A half hour previous to the wedding the church was opened. Nan and Mazie carried their gorgeous freight of flowers and the autumn leaves children had assembled. Gilbert had Lew drive him home. He returned in time, fully dressed, for the impressive ceremony.

It was an exceedingly pretty wedding. Anzelm and Anna had seven brides' maids and their escorts, the girls gowned in the very gayest of colors. Carloads of friends piled into the auditorium.

"Biggest crowd I ever saw in the church," Mrs. John Cummings remarked. "I like to see the foreign folks taking an interest in our American churches. I think our pastor has the right idea."

In the church vestry, following the wedding, Gilbert gave special notice to Selma, who, with Dagmar and Elsa watched

the newly married couple skurrying for shelter in the parked runabout amid flying confetti, rice, bean bags, wild auto tooting and lusty yelling.

"Lovely, wasn't it?"

Selma spoke to the pastor.

In a few minutes she spoke again.

"It must be wonderful to be able to marry people. Think of all the happiness you can bring people! But it must be the most wonderful of all to be married. I hope I'll have a great big church wedding some time. And—if I ever get married—I shall want children, too."

What did she mean by that? What frankness! Yet Selma and Finnish girls in general were exactly like that. They talked as readily and innocently about having children as farmers discussed the new spring planting.

"Hope you will," Gilbert encouraged. "Two's company, three's a crowd. But most of us love crowds, don't we?"

"Yes, most of us." Selma slid her eyes away.

"There they go!" she exclaimed, pointing to a car riotous with red and white streamers, whirling off, waving her white, creamy hands, her strong, firm body shaking all over, tense on tiptoe in the large church doorway.

TRYST WITH BEAUTY

There is almost imperishable beauty in a clothesline.

It was this sudden, breath-taking realization that led to romance—a strange, upsetting romance for Selma and Gilbert. Directly in the one case; indirectly in the other.

The Reverend Gilbert Gould Chalmers, not a great while graduated from seminary, pastor for three years in Hill Grove, a clustered, idyllic town in the emerald hills of Connecticut, had an important and beautiful hobby. Oil painting.

He had studied art before finally deciding for the Christian Ministry. His love of beauty was wed to a thirst for morals. A rather strategic marriage. This dualism both made and broke him.

As a preacher he was shockingly unconventional sometimes; as an artist he did not quite dare "paint the thing as he saw it." His religious code, some said, hurt his art; his free, exotic spirit, an artist's, killed him for the church, others stoutly insisted.

This day it is art that intrudes an unsuspected, tremendous theme into the developing, ordinary lives of two people.

Monday morning the Reverend Gilbert Chalmers, calling on a sick parishioner, walked by the Kivella farm.

He stopped short.

A casual glance at the house detected a blaze of rich, warm

astonishing color. The July sun's pot of gold had emptied its molten contents on shirts, dresses, lingerie, bathing suits, stockings, ties and other clothes. The clothesline became almost a rainbow-mist of color against the dark green background of elms and cedars.

"B e a u t i f u l"

This one word raced, like a released relay runner, through consciousness, around and around.

Gilbert drank in this new, uncommon beauty that flashed and scintillated from a back yard; one he had pased in and out of while making pastoral calls; one never so alluring as now.

He hastily made his call, returned to the manse, procured paint kit, easel and folding seat and hastened back to his tryst with beauty.

As Gilbert turned from the winding dirt road to a small patch of grass next to a rambling stone wall, a girl's figure, a second and third, loomed into the colorful panorama of the yard. Two of the figures disappeared into the house. A third advanced.

She, too, added to the momentary ecstasy of the sun-filled yard, rearing like a glorious flower beside the clothesline, near the plain, drab house, a smoke-house and shed in rear.

In red gingham dress squared in whites, a vivid red belt, made of the same cloth, outlining her shapely, nicely contoured waist, a tiny band of red ribbon fastening to and imprisoning a billowing heap of white-gold hair, a face of mingled hues beneath—the total effect was one of rich, delicious creaminess, the bare legs like firm, pretty stems, showing from just below the knees to the ground, also reminding of the delicious creaminess. To Gilbert, artist spirit, the girl was a flower. A most entrancing flower revealing sudden, unexpected loveliness in a desultory, meagre back yard.

This mood came and went, swift as summer lightning. A single, blinding, all-illuminating flash. Then it passed. Again his eye moved back to the clothesline.

Gilbert got his easel in order, unfolding it, lengthening its legs.

"Going to paint my clothesline, the clothespoles and all? What do you see in a clothesline?" She spoke, the whites of her eyes intense, a smile playing about the corners of her mouth.

"Just wait and see," he counselled, digging the steel points of his easel into the earth, fastening the small canvass-board inside the wooden pegs.

"I never heard of anybody painting such a thing." Selma still observed curiously; one hand fussed with her billowed hair.

"John Singer Sargent once painted a clothesline in Italy. It's among his water colors in the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I'm not a Sargent. But there's brilliant color in a clothesline. Wait till I get through—if I can paint the thing as I see it. Bet you'll like it and be surprised, too!"

Looking at the finished sketch, three hours later, Selma stood wonder struck. For quite some time she studied the small, six by nine painting. Following Gilbert's example she approached and walked away from the sketch, trying to get the best light on it, the correct focus.

"Not too near," the artist suggested. "Always step back to study an oil painting."

Her eyes moved back and forth, back and forth, from the yard to the picture. Her eyes ran over with astonishment. Lips moved silently; new touches of fresh, warm color, rose and fell along her lips. She shifted her body's weight from one foot to the other. Gilbert, amused, watched the girl's kindling enthusiasm.

"That's the best picture you ever did—that I ever saw!" the girl finally judged, drawing close to the painting. A hand was thrust out. Selma laughed.

"Look! My finger's green!" she frolicked.

"And so are you! Didn't you know it would do that?"

"How should I?"

"Look out. Don't spoil it*" Gilbert shouted, as the girl edged close again.

"Why should I? It's my clothesline. To think my clothesline could look so pretty! Gee! You see things, don't you, things my mother and father don't see—or Lato! Gee!"

She turned back, as an animal after a moment's interruption, devours again a particularly tempting kill.

"You saw all that in my clothesline," she owned again, as passing in and out of fairyland.

"There's beauty everywhere, if only one has eyes to see it. In rain, in storms, in mud puddles—"

"In mud puddles?"

Again Selma stirred and her eyes left their tryst with picture and yard to search an artist's face. "You surely don't mean that? That mud puddles are pretty. Now I know you're fooling!"

"Well, I'm not! An old man, a retired artist in Gloucester, once showed me color and witching beauty in mud puddles, after a rain. The sky, the buildings, the sun, clouds, everything entrancing was prisoned in a mud puddle. I laughed at him at first. But I learned to see beauty through the old painter's eye—in a mud puddle. You've got to have eyes to see with, though, if you're going to see beauty's things."

"Do you think I could get to see pretty things in a mud puddle?"

"It might take years to get your little bullet-eyes opened," he teased.

"Gee! Mud puddles! And pretty colors like that in my clothesline!"

Suddenly she changed, her eyes snapped, her words crackled.

"Wait till I call mother!"

She raced toward the house calling: "Mother! Mother! Mother!"

In short order a stout, buxom woman emerged from the house, her hands rearranging her hair, then readjusting the long, span-clean apron she had evidently snatched for the occasion. She tramped heavily after Selma. Nearing the visitor she lifted her head.

"Selma—she say I should look at picture. Excuse—please."

She ran a hand through her hair and made a final lunge at the apron.

"I am hard-working woman. Expect no visitor. But, Selma, she say—"

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Kivella. Don't mind me." Gilbert reassured the hesitant, apologizing woman. "Have a look if you care to."

Selma fastened one arm to her mother's. With the other she pointed enthusiastically at the oil painting.

"There! Look! What did I say? Our clothesline. See—the clothespoles, the shed too. Even father's chopping block and the axe over there, by the shed. See!"

Selma loomed beautifully in the late afternoon sunlight. Her voice seemed to lose its coarseness; her hands of white marble, splashed by the sun's crimsoning lustre, were ravishingly lovely. But the eyes fascinated Gilbert. For once in their life they danced. They flung off their heaviness and danced. They escaped their small, narrow ovals and they danced.

Mrs. Kivella, still rubbing her hands in her new, starched apron, stared a moment at the painting. Her eyes stumbled clumsily from canvas to yard and back again.

"Yes, you right. My clothesline, sure it is."

She turned to Gilbert.

"I live here many year. I never see yard like that. Very strange, you painter-men. But excuse, please. I have to feed chicken." She bowed, blundered and trod heavily away.

Selma lingered while Gilbert wiped and cleaned his brushes, scooped the remaining paint from his palette with his palette-knife. He lifted it from the palette and with his knife spread it upon a nearby elm. The colors—all in the rainbow—were daubed upon the bark.

"See. I leave a souvenir," he informed the girl. "Something to remember me by."

"Huh! I'd rather have the picture," she replied. Her lips were arched pleasantly but her words were serious.

While intently watching him the mother clapped hands and called from the back yard: "Come! Time to peel potatoes!"

The girl, snatching another swift, intense look at the painting, scampered off.

LISTENING IN

Selma, from the unusual hour of tryst in her back yard with beauty's things, became an art enthusiast. That is—for one picture. Though she had observed Gilbert's paintings often in his home, dusting the rooms, helping Evelyn—mistress of the manse—on wash days, helping in times of illness, she had never before paid much attention to them. She had never displayed, in any way, a fondness for paintings.

Things were different now.

When working in the manse or when calling, to confer with Gilbert relative to special music for Sunday, Easter or the Christmas season, she invariably spent time studying a color-laden clothesline in a sunny back yard. She never passed through the parlor unaware of its silent, human-interest appeal.

One day, in joking mood, Gilbert said to the girl, who stared at the picture, dust-pan and brush in hand: "I guess I'll have to deed that one to you, in case anything ever happens to me."

"I'd love to have it," came the quiet, deep-breathing answer, her eyes flooding an intense fascination upon him.

Selma's eyes were an outstanding feature. In every crisis they became the deciding factor.

Again Gilbert was observing them as artists scan the unusual and the interesting.

The pupils were not only small, a grey-blue effect of ovals,

pierced by single, brilliant lights, but the whole eyes small, the lids seemingly heavy, though the lashes were not long or thick. Yet it seemed that the lids drooped down over the eyes. When Selma smiled they narrowed to the merest slits and one wondered how on earth she managed to smile and see at the same instant.

Now she was smiling.

"I'd love to have it. I won't forget you promised it to me."

Then, swinging not clumsily or swiftly about, she began her cleaning work again.

Later, in the evening, this being Wednesday, the one of two nights the little town's library was open evenings, Selma and two smaller sisters, Dagmar and Elsa, made another weekly jaunt to the place of the thousand books.

Returning homeward at dusk, coming down the state road, Selma noticed the gayly lit front room of the manse, flinging already a mild, pleasing lustre into the lovely, spacious front yard, with its nicely kept lawn, its parade of elms and maples, like handsome giants on display, the lower branches of trees disporting themselves in a vagrant summer wind and bathing in the delicious flood of crimson lustre.

"Let's go over," Selma ventured to her sisters, as, arms piled with the week's reading, she led them with a certain daring, lackadaisical swing down the cement road that the state had paved in the country.

"Too late," Dagmar grunted, fifteen, two years younger than Selma, already as tall, larger in build, not nearly so attractive. Little Elsa, ten, rarely said anything when Selma was along.

"I'm going to," Selma declared. "If you two want to go on—go on."

"What will mother say?" Dagmar snapped in the same jerky, grunting manner, her face unlit, her voice untuned.

"Oh, you two can wait down at the store."

"Nope, don't want to."

"Then go on home!"

But when Selma ventured across the road and up the three cement steps that led up a small slope from the road to the cement walk leading to the house, Dagma and Elsa followed.

"Going to ring the bell?" Dagma grunted.

"No, I'm not."

"Going to rap on the window?"

"Course not! Can't you see they've got company?" Already Selma's swift-flashing eyes had delineated the outlines of a car in the yard, in the driveway.

The pastor had not indulged in the luxury of a car. The parish had complained some about this wastage of good garage space, but one genial member of the Official Board, a Mrs. John Cummings, had insisted that, seeing as he was young, active, and a brisk walker, he could still do a decent amount of parish calling.

A car at the house therefore always symbolized company.

"I'm not going to stay," Dagma grunted, more precisely.

"Then don't!" Selma shot back, half aloud. "Time for you to be in bed anyhow!"

Dagma and Elsa lurched down the road and Selma was conscious of their resolute departure as deliberate feet started a vanishing parade of echoes through the intense country stillness.

No, there would be no bell-ringing tonight, no window-rapping or yelling.

Country young people had great sport tormenting the amiable young pastor. He seemed to revel in this sort of torment. But as for Evelyn—well, she was another matter. It was great fun, though, seeing the front door fly open, seeing

Evelyn's prim, brisk little silhouette in the flood of light, hearing her boisterous, angry scolding.

Selma did not venture upon the wide, wooden porch, abundantly latticed; she circled around to a side window and stole a glance inside. The house, amply sheltered from the road by a wide lawn and the shade trees, thus insured for a measure of privacy, was not in dire need of a curtain's strategy. Often Evelyn did not bother with the side-window curtains; only with the two in front.

Selma's eye swiftly distinguished Gilbert, in the rocker by the radio. Evelyn sat on the divan. Another woman, a stranger, sat beside her. A man's dark silhouette loomed in Selma's range of vision, in the wing chair. Not until she heard the voice of the man whose face she could not see did she recognize the visitors. Gilbert's brother from New Hampshire and his wife.

It was not difficult to distinguish voices or to follow the thread of conversation.

The one called Mabel, Ralph's wife, was speaking.

"Of course we're proud of our children, Evelyn. Why shouldn't we be? Audrey and Ralph Junior are really adorable children. I wouldn't be without children for the world!" Mabel's face, while she spoke, was a beautiful thing to see. "They teach us so many things. They bring a new, brighter love into the home. A kind of second spring, I said to Ralph. You agreed, didn't you?" She smiled over toward the dark silhouette. Its shoulders moved and a voice answered, "Right-o, my love."

Mabel sped on.

"Children create a family out of a couple, don't they, Ralph?" She still scanned her husband's face, her own face enraptured.

"Bull's eye again!" a strong, heavy voice responded.

Evelyn, that instant, plunged headlong into the conversation, her mildly rouged face flaring into new, more compelling crimson.

"But they are expensive! I read in a magazine once that it takes a five thousand dollar investment to bring one child up. On Gil's salary, how could we do it?" She stared defiantly around the circle, from one to the other.

"Oh, you can manage somehow, Evelyn," Mabel encouraged, "Where there's a will there's a way. An old saying, but a good one."

"But we can't afford the privilege of a second-hand car, to say nothing of rearing a child!"

"Why, Evelyn!"

"Yes, that's very easily spoken, Mabel. Ralph's getting double Gil's salary. Don't forget."

"But he didn't always have twenty-five hundred."

"You didn't always have children, did you? How many did you have at twelve hundred?"

"It's not question of money, this children business; it's a matter of vision!" Gilbert lunged enthusiastically into the conversation becoming too distinctly feminine.

"Vision? What do you mean?" Two women clamored for explanations.

"Poor or not, anyone with vision knows that the only hope for the future is in children—cradles for a home, business, a church, a country. Birth control's the bunk!"

"Why, Gilbert!" gasped Mabel.

"Oh, that's a popular line of his," Evelyn shot across the divan to her comrade at the other end. "Don't be alarmed. He rides it like a hobby. Teddy Roosevelt type, heroic motif and all that! It's up to the women—to bear children—and pull the nation out of all its sin and misery!"

Selma, out in the darkness listening, felt her flesh quiver,

the blood swimming hotly in head, breast, heart, a strange, undreamt pressure on her whole flesh—a swift, indescribable pride for Gilbert, a new, sudden fury for Evelyn. She longed to rush into the room and tell that woman something.

Over Evelyn's head was a small painting, only six by nine, in a delicate Roman-gold frame. In that sun-haloed yard there were children. Selma knew that her people were great believers in children. Among the women childlessness was a positive sign of God's displeasure. How could this American woman say what she had just said to a man; and she, a minister's wife.

"I'm telling you"—again the flow of words—"I'm telling you that the idea is simply ridiculous on twelve hundred a year!"

Selma recalled her father, a wood-chopper, with his seven children. Twelve hundred a year to him would spell a paradise on earth. How she longed to intrude her handful of facts into what she considered to be largely a selfish, ignorant outburst.

"And suppose the baby should die inside of a year? Many children die the first year, you know. Also, it's a risk for a woman. So many die every year in child-birth."

"A woman shouldn't marry who isn't willing to take the risk!" Selma blessed the visiting woman for that strong, stalwart word. But Evelyn's face grew white, her eyes went wild.

"I think, Mabel, that such personal matters are, fortunately, none of your affairs!" Evelyn, her voice hard and brittle, her French heels clicking across the waxed floor, whisked from the room.

"Pretty tough, old man."

The visiting brother from New Hampshire reached over, rising, and touched the pastor on the shoulder. "But, cheer up, Rome wasn't built in a day. Patience."

That was all.

But Selma, alert, anxious, art-intoxicated country girl, had learned, long ago, how to see a wide field through a chink in a fence.

Slowly she trudged homeward with her armful of books, thinking, wondering about many things. Once she laughed inside. Then her white, strong fingers clenched.

MIDNIGHT VISITOR

"What's that?"

Evelyn stirred in bed and sat bolt upright in the impenetrable darkness.

"Oh, nothing. The wind likely," Gilbert answered, sleepily, turning over, straightening his long legs to the end of the bed and out through the wooden slats.

"Wind? Foolishness! It's a knock on the side door. Who could it be this time of night?"

"You're dreaming. Go to sleep." His voice, muffled, came from far away.

"Gilbert! It's somebody! Wake up!" Sudden, resolute hands shook the indolent figure.

"Honest, you women—"

But Gilbert did not finish. There could be no doubt that someone knocked on the side door, passionately.

"What an unearthly hour," he grumbled, snapping on the bed-lamp, glancing at his watch on the stand.

"One-thirty. And a night like this! Hear the rain! It's raining pitchforks and barn-shovels, as Mrs. Kivella says!"

"Hurry up!" Evelyn nudged him. "The party will be gone."

"Wish it would. Glory! Have I got to rig up at this unearthly hour?"

"Slip on your bath-robe and slippers. And get a wiggle on!"

Laboriously Gilbert, trying to get his eyes open, stumbled into slippers and pulled on his bath robe, tightened its cord, and ventured into the dark sitting-room. He snapped on the lights, then cautiously approached the door.

Again the door shook in the clutch of the wind. A hard, stout rapping followed.

"Who's there?"

Gilbert was behind the curtained door, peering into the thick darkness. A tall, ungainly silhouette loomed, rain running in rivulets from an old slouch hat.

"Jack—Jack Kivella."

What on earth did he want at the manse at this hour, and on such a night? Was something wrong at the home?

Puzzled, Gilbert opened the door—not too far—maneuvering, the best he could, to keep the wind-driven rain from the newly waxed floor.

"I'm drunk. Can't get home."

The tall, angular figure swayed, the voice thick, unsteady, the words spoken as if very hard and difficult to extricate from the tongue.

"What happened?"

"Out on a bat. Got into a scrap with Bill and Lato. Girl got hurt. Stopped the car. Threw me out. Gad, Revvy, it's a dirty night! Can't you get me home?"

A thousand thoughts raced pell-mell through the pastor's mind. Walk a mile a night like this, street lights for only half a mile? And with Jack in such a condition? Suppose some deacon of the church, McBride or Purdy were afoot, or Wally Rutgers? What would people say?

A gust of cold wind, rain-beaten, blew open the folds of bath-robe about his neck. Rain drove hard and menacing up against the windows.

"Shut the door—please!" Evelyn yelled from the bedroom.
"The floor will be ruined!"

He had planned to purchase a pair of new rubbers a month ago. The umbrella would be no value on such a night; he could not handle it, anyway, in this predicament.

Gilbert hesitated.

"Well, Revvy, if you can't—forgive me for botherin'. Gad! I didn't know no other place to go. I—"

The tottering, angular figure lurched about and slid down the steps, crumpling into a heap on the cement walk. Gilbert started through the door, as the long, black figure fought to its feet. It turned a grey, dark face at its startled host.

"Never mind me, Revvy. What the hell if I don't get home! Maybe the water'll soak the gin out'n me. Who cares, anyhow? No work—no girl—no dough!" Arms shot out wildly. Utter despair was gestured in the saturating rain, the floods pouring down hat and disappearing along neck and shoulders.

"Thanks a million, Revvy—"

"Wait!"

Gilbert dashed indoors, flung off bathrobe, knocked off slippers, bolted into clothes, slid into raincoat and, spitting out burning sentences to the awe-struck Evelyn, sped from the house, down the walk, up a street and came abreast of the swaying, sputtering youth.

A firm, sure arm seized hold of this struggling transient of the dark, as a deliberate arm on a wind-spun wheel arrests a vessel's careening and with slow, brave purpose gets a storm-driven ship under control.

"Come on, Jack. Let's get home."

The fellow subsided into silence, becoming almost a dead weight. Gilbert shoved, hauled, pushed, yanked the rain-drenched youth home through the night, the friendly arc lamps still yielding frequent moments of delicious illumination.

"Thank God for street lights!" he was thinking. "Civilization has its salient features."

This he was thinking when a dark figure, huddled over in the rain, loomed into the arc lamp's radiance, directly ahead. Who could this be, out in this furious storm, at such an hour?

The strange, unrecognized figure came abreast. A face was lifted. Eyes stared out from beneath oilskin-hat. The eyes stared a moment longer. Looks of recognition were exchanged.

"Elder Rutgers," muttered Gilbert to himself. "What's he doing at this hour?" Though not discerning the features, Gilbert believed he saw that pert little face, pink cheeks, black moustache, the diminutive nose, the whole of the little man censuring him. The lingering stare said everything.

The impact of the new personality appeared to revive Jack.

He struck up the chorus to one of the loud, jangling popular swing-songs of the day. Gilbert's sudden, fierce ruse to stop his noise was only so much wasted energy.

Jack slumped into indifference when Gilbert turned into the dirt road that led directly to the Kivella homestead.

He splashed into mud puddles and out again, slipped over a wet shoulder of road and the two sprawled headlong into the rain-soaked brush of the roadside. Up and on again—pressing through the wind-whirled, rain-soaked darkness, up the slope to the Kivella farm.

The artist-spirit did not even recall, in this bitter, angry moment, the vision of a sun-splashed clothesline. He shoved his charge to the back door and rapped—once, twice, a score of times. Soon pleasant light penetrated the black, furious yard. A lamp had been lit.

A voice sounded from inside the kitchen window, a silhouette suddenly thrust itself into the mild yellow lustre.

"Who's that?"

Selma.

Gilbert was grateful she happened to be the inquisitor.

"Reverend Mr. Chalmers. I've got Jack."

"Just a minute. I'll be right there."

Shortly the outside entry door was opened. Gilbert got his charge inside, into the kitchen, and let him sink, now unconscious, into a kitchen chair beside the stove.

"What's the trouble?"

Selma, frightened, stared at her brother, then turned to Gilbert, drawing her kimono closer to her waist. "Excuse me, Mr. Chalmers. But at this time of night I didn't—"

"Oh, that's all right. Jack called at the house. Drunk. Said he got into a fight. The boys threw him from the car—Bill and Lato. Couldn't get home. I just couldn't abandon him in the rain—to fall unconscious along the road—to lie there all night—to get pneumonia. Here he is. Perhaps I'd better help you get him to bed. He's rather heavy."

"Never mind, Mr. Chalmers, I'll get father. Thanks, though, an awful lot. I had no idea you thought that much of Jack." Her small, intense eyes glittered like twin pools of diamonds in the warm, cheerful illumination of the lamp on the kitchen table.

"It wasn't Jack, exactly, Selma. I'd do that for anyone—who really needed help."

"You'd do as much for—me?"

"Of course, if you were in need. Why not?"

"Mr. Chalmers, I think you're swell!"

A firm, honest word, not swiftly or exotically spoken. She spoke as though her remark had been well considered and commended by her inmost heart.

"Good-night."

She extended a hand, beautifully lusted by the lamp-light. It nestled in his hand, throbbed there, pulsed there, only

for a moment. The warmth of her life ran along the fingers and escaped from them, blended with his flesh and ran up his arm. A sudden, strange fusion of hearts.

"Good-night."

The pale, water-color blue eyes seemed black in the mild lamplight, deep and strong and soulful. Perhaps an illusion; but, even so, compelling. Her white-gold hair, fondly dishevelled, sparkled at the ends in the lamplight as though hung with rhinestones.

"Good-night."

Her thin, prettily arched lips were curved into Cupid-bows, faintly, faintly suggestive of far, hidden desires. Lines of delight rose and fell against her full, round cheeks.

"Good-night, Mr. Chalmers. I'll never forget—we'll never forget this."

Gilbert, let go the hand that encouraged no immediate withdrawal.

Wordlessly stirred, surprisingly happy, he bent once more into the wind-witched night. Somebody inside the house, a girl with a lamp in her hand, moved the light from the kitchen on into the front room, to give him as much splendor as she could, to brighten his desultory journey home.

SNOW SCENE

"I'm going to get a snow scene today," Gilbert informed his wife one December afternoon, directly after dinner. "The sun is warm. One day in a thousand. New, fresh-fallen snow. Clouds clearing away. A perfect day."

"Where are you going?"

"Think I'll paint the church."

"The church?"

Evelyn finished drying the dishes. "You mean you're going to cart your stuff up on the main road?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Never mind. It doesn't matter." Evelyn slipped off her apron and whisked into the dining room.

An artist sees white magic in the snow, rainbow brilliance, undreamt-of-splendor where sun, cloud-curtains, snow, ever-greens and lavender shadows mingle together in a thrilling pantomime of beauty.

More pure, brilliant color can be bequeathed to a snow scene perhaps than to any other. And Gilbert was aware of possibilities before he left the house, easel and painting kit in hand. He would not make use of his folding seat today. His over-shoes would help keep his ankles warm; but he would need to keep on the move.

How pretty the church premises were, blanketed in sun-sparkling snow! The evergreens that framed the church, their great, firm branches laden with it, how generous they seemed to be at Christmas time, their arms heaped with shining white bundles, gifts of beauty for artist-seers and all the earth! Gilbert thought of a Bible verse—"wrapped in swaddling clothes." The shrubs seemed to be children, wrapped in Mother Nature's swaddling-white, folded tenderly away from the prying reach of the cold winter wind.

Ideas made conquest of his mind while he squeezed the necessary colors on his palette—generous portions of yellow ochre, chrome yellow, vermillion, cobalt-blue—and a considerable heap of flake white.

He had made his pencil sketch and was getting well started with his coloring when Obadiah came scuffing down the ploughed-out road, banked with snow on both sides.

Obadiah.

Everybody knew Obadiah. Fifty years old and over. Living with an older brother. Twice a year he dressed up—for Christmas and Memorial Day.

Every day in his life he called on Violet Hemingway, a thin, wizened spinster a mile down the road. For thirty years Obadiah had not missed a day. This was his boast.

Down the road he scuffed in his old khaki togs and homespun, his rubber boots sloshing through the snow, a checkered cap slanting across and completely over one eye.

Once a fortnight Obadiah shaved; how he did and enjoyed it nobody ever knew. Usually he looked as though he had a month's growth on. Always chewing tobacco, the brown stains making tell-tale lines down his chin from each extremity of his perpetually moving lower lip.

Gilbert heard the sloshing of feet in the snow, the heavy noise of rattling rubber. He knew the pedestrian and looked up.

"Good afternoon, Obadiah."

"Afternoon."

"Fine day."

"Not so bad."

"Out for a little walk?"

"Daily tramp."

"How's Violet these days?"

"Same's ever."

The scuffling, shuffling figure's shadow fell across the canvas-board. There was nothing to indicate that Obadiah was conscious of the painting. Nor did he attempt to halt progress.

He drove a mouthful of tobacco into a snowbank, cleared his throat and, at peace with himself and the world, jaunted steadily on his way.

Gilbert noticed the snowbank splashed with the dense, brown juice. Almost unconscious reflex action. An eye followed, for an instant, the slowly disappearing figure, sinking in distance into the uprearing snowbanks.

In another hour high school boys and girls, leaving the bus at town center, the bus that carried them to school in Norwich, clustered about the artist, watching him at work.

"It's going to be very pretty," ventured Selma, senior in high school, in the charmed circle.

"I never saw blue shadows in snow before," one, Lato, remarked, a Finnish boy, sometimes Selma's companion on school outings. "Looks crazy to me."

"That's because you're not an artist," Selma responded.

"Glad I'm not!"

"So say we all!" another feminine voice intruded.

Unfriendly, friendly remarks were passed, the charmed circle thinning. School children from the local grammar grades soon gathered about the artist. A snow-ball fight developed.

Gilbert drove all away save Selma and Nan Thurston. They were mannerly; they might stay. Lato returned to the little group.

Again Obadiah's long, awkward silhouette reared up out of the white silences.

"How's the boy?" called Lato.

"Same as you," came the gruff, low reply.

"How's that?"

"Too old fer me years."

Again the sudden release of a well-seasoned mouthful, the smack of lips, the uninterrupted, rhythmic rumble of the heavily-laden rubber.

Selma raised a hand to her lips and glared at Lato.

The old figure, like an effigy in stone, held its ominous silence and trudged on.

"You shouldn't have said that," Selma scolded, when the figure had disappeared.

"Huh! Nobody minds him."

"Maybe they do."

The sketch was developing nicely, the church and a bit of the chapel alongside coming out finely into prominence, when a loud, piercing whistle sounded down the road.

"Huh! Alma's out of work already," Lato commented.

Voices intruded upon the late afternoon stillness. Alma was having a momentary frolic in words with a neighbor who passed.

"Cold weather we've bin havin', Alma."

"Cold stretch indeed! Cold as all out doors! But I don't mind." A loud, buxom voice. "I don't mind the cold. It's the heat I mind. I can put enough on in the winter, all the petticoats I need, to keep warm. But—ding blast it!—if I can take enough off in the summer to keep cool and still look presentable!"

A large, full-bodied woman, large-waisted, came tramping down the winter road, amply clothed, resembling a piece of

over-stuffed furniture, huge with clothes, long dress, galoshes, scarf, tam, a small black bag in hand.

"Workin', Alma?"

"You bet. W. P. A. Sewin' and stitchin' over in the old schoolhouse every day. Don't know how me and Ma could git along these days without work. Awful mess of back taxes to pay. Nope—don't!"

Alma Manning, whose last name was numbered among the missing by everyone, had paused long enough in the cold for conversation. She continued her resolute advance.

"Paintin' a pitcher, eh, Reverend? Brrr! Don't see how anyone can git enough courage these days to paint except the giddy gals. They'd paint their cheeks no matter how red the wind bit 'em! Powder their noses, too, even if they fell into snowbanks!"

Sleigh bells were suddenly mingled with the loud, boisterous sentences. A horse reined in. A man's voice intruded. Gilbert glanced up.

"Good afternoon, Brother Rutgers."

"Good afternoon."

The voice was distinctly in conventional mood as the deacon, his plump, rose-red wife beside him, scanned the little group, so near the church.

"Mightn't you be obstructin' traffic, paintin' in the road?"

Gilbert, palette in hand, brushes in the other, smiled up at the two in the little black sleigh, horse-blankets covering them to the middle.

"I don't think so. I'm well over to one side."

"Is this just the place for making a scene?" the plump little woman questioned, her face flushing a redder hue, a general habit when talking, her voice trembling. "Right in front of the church?"

"I'm painting the church."

The lady arched her neck and screwed her face around, over Selma's shoulder, to get sight of the picture. She did not speak of it: but, after the slight interruption, continued:

"This is hardly the thing, Reverend Chalmers."

"Pardon?"

"This is hardly the thing!" the brittle, precise voice emphasized. "It's unheard of, a minister of the gospel out painting this winter weather and rounding up a crowd right plumb in front of the meeting house. What would people say—strangers, I mean, chancing by, if they knew?"

"If they knew what?" The pastor was becoming provoked, the nervousness of his manner indicating it.

"That you were the pastor!" With warm, sure finality the rotund woman, an old Connecticut Yankee, spoke.

"Why, what could they say? I'm only taking a picture in colors of my church. Many tourists take pictures, don't they?"

"But they are tourists, Mr. Chalmers." She had dropped the proper word.

"I know, Mrs. Rutgers. But is there any harm in painting a picture of my church?"

"Our church," the old lady corrected. She nudged her partner. "Drive on Wally, we are getting nowhere. The pastor is in an unpleasant mood today."

"Gid-dap!"

The whip whistled above and descended up the horse's flanks. He leaped forward, throwing the driver and wife brutally back against the seat.

"Heh! Whoa!" Wally, face red as two carnations, pulled like mad on the reins, got control of Betsy and urged her on more moderately. The old lady, sputtering, blustering, scolded Wally.

"What a dame!" Selma exploded, as the sleigh squeaked off, its tinkling bells drowning out the vociferous voices.

"Some guy!" Lato added.

CHOIR PRACTICE

"My father isn't going to bring people to church, ever again!"

Nellie Purdy opened a long, heated debate after choir practice in the little white parish house or chapel, nestling beside the church, a driveway between, one Friday evening in the late spring.

The choir had just practiced the anthem for Sunday: "Great peace have they which love Thy law."

Nellie, a grey-faced, anemic-looking girl, inclined to unnatural plumpness, gave no evidence of fear or the proverbial female modesties as she accosted the pastor.

A dozen young people clustered about the little fumed-oak organ in one corner of the main room of the parish house, which, in sub-zero weather, was often marshalled into service for the Sunday morning gatherings. Electric light blazed overhead. A stand, piled with hymnals and special numbers, was close by.

Selma still lingered at the organ. Evelyn stood next to Nellie and as the other spoke, moved slightly away.

"I'm sorry. How's that?"

The young pastor's face colored; he placed his sheet of music on the organ.

"It was last Sunday's sermon, father said."

"I thought it was particularly good. Lots in it to make

one think!" spoke up Jim Cummings, high school graduate, who worked in a grist mill with his uncle—an energetic, ambitious youth.

"I thought it was lousy!" young Sam Rutgers exploded. He glared appreciatively over at Nellie.

"What was so objectionable in the sermon?" the pastor interrupted, facing the two critics, a wall of eyes closing them in, of mingled emotional interest.

"Factory working conditions! What do you know about them?" Nellie expostulated, face twitching, lips flinging out burning syllables as though they scorched her mouth. "You had been preaching pretty good sermons for a couple of months; but last Sunday you went and spoiled it all!"

"I thought last Sunday's talk by far the best I've heard all year!" Jim again commented with enthusiasm, vaulting his eyes among the group.

Nellie was not to be obstructed.

"You'd been preaching a series of sermons on beauty and love. Father was pleased. So was Uncle Mack. Uncle Mack invited some of the men in the foundry who work for him in Norwich, to attend church last Sunday. He told them you were pretty good. They all came. Then you deliberately called down my father and made a goat of him right before his help!"

A thunder-bolt struck the listeners. No one was in a mood for song. Sam Rutgers, face red, hair black, pert nose—a small edition of his dad—stood, music in hand, mouth agape. Mil. Crouse, the oldest member of the choir, a spinster school teacher of thirty-five, stared at the aggravated Nellie.

"I only illustrated a theme of Jesus: How much is a man better than a sheep. I said that leaders in business often treat their help with less consideration than they treat animals. Why, it's common knowledge that in some places men are treated

worse than dogs. I mentioned child labor, Negro employment in some Southern communities, girl stitchers in great New England city lofts and many other evils of the present social regime. All common knowlege!" Gilbert spoke as though sermonizing, his manner and his very gestures warm and compelling.

"Wasn't that true?" He ran his eyes along the circle of faces. There were answering nods and stiff, silent objectors.

"But you didn't have to bring in the foundry!" Nellie whirled upon him. "Everybody knew who you meant, then."

"I didn't know your uncle worked in a foundry."

"You did, too!"

"Sorry. I must differ."

"My uncle doesn't work there, either! He's boss. And he's no driver, like you said he was!"

"He is, too, a driver!" spoke up Nan Thurston. "My big brother works for him, pouring metal, loading cars. He comes home in summer and can hardly eat his supper, he's so dead tired. The flesh is peeling right off of him. He says your uncle's a terrible driver for a churchman! That's why my brother don't come to church!"

"Huh! Your family was always jealous of mine!" Nellie's lips curled at Nan. "Not in our set. That's what's the matter!"

"Why, Nellie Purdy, if this wasn't the church I'd slap your insolent face!" Nan, eyes throwing out spurts of flame that singed, advanced.

The young pastor wheeled into action in dead earnest.

"Here we are, fighting like cats and dogs after having learned a peace-anthem for Sunday. Rather ridiculous situation, isn't it?"

"But, Rev. Mr. Chalmers, you should be more careful what you say." Mil. Crouse in her precise, cool tone of voice, worked into the limelight, adroitly. "You are always antagonizing

or offending somebody. I've heard quite a number say that they're fed up on that love and beauty stuff you preach all the time. It isn't Bible."

"Isn't Bible?"

For the moment this new frontal attack took the pastor off guard. He struggled for time and reinforced thought. "Isn't every one of my texts taken from the Bible?"

"But he doesn't know how to interpret the Bible, Pop says!" young Sam whirled, grinning knowingly over at Mil.

The teacher-spinster glared, flint-eyed, at young Sam. "I'll take care of this," she informed him. Then she returned to the pastor.

"But your themes, Rev. Mr. Chalmers, are not worked out just the way we expect. The congregation has had its fill of art. A church service really is not exactly an art class." Lines of faint, tardy color rose and fell on greying flesh beneath her eyes. Her lips were curled most unpleasantly. "Really, the Sunday morning service is for a sermon, not a painting lesson."

Selma stood beside Evelyn, her small, grey-blue eyes fastened on the pastor's flushed face. Obviously he was upset by this deliberate sally.

"What—do—you—mean—art class?" he stammered.

"Two Sundays ago," Mil. proceeded, carefully, exactly, as though giving out a lesson in school— "you preached on? Let me see. O, yes. May Winds and Apple Blossoms. Did you call that a sermon?" Her body was resolutely slanted forward; the index finger of her right hand reared like a signpost. "If you did, I didn't!"

"Perhaps it wasn't the conventional type of sermon, Miss Crouse; but it had its lesson. I selected a text from the Book of Psalms."

"Yes, of course. Texts are plenty. But what did you do with it? You spent all the time telling about an experience

of your own in your back yard! I never heard anything like it in all my life!"

"But the lesson!" Gilbert insisted, his voice strengthening, his hands gesticulating, a vital earnestness in voice and manner. "You couldn't have got the lesson."

"Well, what was it?"

"I used the story as a parable. A method of Jesus'. I related the experience as it affected me. Working out in my small back-yard garden, I noticed the heavy wind-squall coming up. The black clouds were frightening. While busy picking up hoe, pitch-fork, seeds, I observed a moment of beauty."

Nellie Purdy giggled. She was now chewing gum. She ran two fingers into her mouth, drew out a length of gum, chewed it in again, then pressed it against her teeth and broke it. Selma moved over and nudged her in the ribs.

"Heh! Cut that out!" Nellie vociferated.

Selma did not give evidence of knowing anything.

Gilbert continued building up his theme.

"The sudden wind reached the apple orchard in the next field, whirled in and out among the boughs and apple blossoms snowed down. Their whiteness was strikingly accentuated against the green hills and brassy sky. It was a magnificent moment!

"The beauty—the sheer beauty of the scene fairly snatched my breath. Reminded me of a host of ballet-dansantes, white-frocked, spinning in the breeze, whirling down from balconies of trees, dancing in ecstasy, swooning on the soft, green carpets of the grass."

"And what had that to do with a sermon?"

"Just this. I said that every hour of storm has its exquisite moment of beauty, if we have eyes to see. That the winds of God only distress the hearts that fail to find in life the sublime,

imperishable moments!"

"And what of that?"

"Well, I was illustrating the Psalmist's purpose. He said—
"I will seek . . . all the days of my life . . . to behold beauty'."

"Oh, piffle!"

A second nudge in the ribs, stronger. Nellie spun hotly upon the Finn.

"Say who do you think you are?" she yelled.

"You should be taught manners." Selma spoke quietly, firmly. Eyes grappled eyes. A sudden, fierce struggle. Neither face was vanquished.

"I didn't find any sermon in that," Mil. Crouse judged, giving her head a definite little shake as if doing her own cheering.

"You—wouldn't!" Evelyn snapped. She turned to Gilbert. "Come on. Let's go. Party's getting rough!" She enjoyed the desolating effect of her modernity on the awe-struck group.

"Such language from a preacher's wife," gasped Nellie.

"Wait a moment."

Gilbert flung off his wife's urgent fingers. He faced Nellie.

"Tell your uncle this. I'm sorry if he took my remarks personal. I was dealing with principles, not persons. Some time ago I passed a foundry in New Britain. I observed a short, diminutive foreigner, standing on the sidewalk, looking through one blackened window on a summer day. He squinted in at the husky, sweating figures, naked to the waist, grimly, almost ghoulish in the soot and fire-light. I heard him mutter as I passed: 'No good. Too much.' That gave me the idea for my sermon."

"Well, you certainly chose a beautiful time (she gave sly, adroit emphasis to the adjective)—you certainly chose a beautiful time to deliver it."

"Our people want sermons on God and the Bible, not on business and beauty. Mil. Crouse offered as a parting shot.

Just for an instant Gilbert held poise again and ventured conversation. He felt his temperature rising to blood-heat.

"Everything in the world is a matter of beauty. What is music—the music we've been singing—if not tonal beauty? Art is pictorial beauty, in terms of design and color. Oratory is beauty in voice placement and language. Literature—style and poetry—these are beauty's things in construction, rhythm and good order. Beauty in buildings—that's architecture. Beauty in living—that's ethics; and in worship, that's religion. Beauty in the Ultimate!—that's GOD!"

Gilbert did not extricate himself from Evelyn's decisive pressure. "Good-night, everybody," he called from the doorway.

All the way home the anthem's leading measure raced and hurdled and roared through consciousness: "Great peace have they that love Thy law—and nothing shall offend them."

H O R S E - F L Y

Gilbert decided to celebrate his birthday in true artistic fashion. The clear, cerulean sky, the mild, warm winds carrying delicious freight of flowers, the lavender shadows in the sloping hills of chrome-green, all called for portrayal.

Collecting his materials he started off for the Kivella farm. He was soon addressing the mother in the sun-splashed back yard, piled with chicken-crates. A truck had just dumped them.

"Where is there a good scene in this neighborhood?" he inquired.

The perspiring matron ran her apron across her face and looked perplexed. Her eyes glided from chicken-crates to the distant, long, red coops. She spied a vanishing, colorful figure.

"Wait, please. I get Elsa. Perhaps she know."

A loud, stentorian voice fetched the girl at once.

The mother spoke rapidly in Finnish to the girl and, excusing herself, hurried indoors.

"Mother thinks you might like to see Horse-fly," Elsa's mild, shy voice ventured.

"Horse-fly?"

"That's where we go swimming."

"Good enough. Go ahead. I'll dare anything once."

Elsa, strongly built, energetic, bashful little tow-head in

her early teens, started simultaneously across the dirt road.

They crawled through cattle-bars, along a grassy, nicely contoured path, across a wide, marshy field to the wood-lot, along a leafy lane piled high with aging cord-wood, in and out of elm and white birch fortresses, probably a mile.

Soon the hum of voices gave way to a fierce scream, a furious oath. Elsa's frightened eyes swung about, to search the pastor's face. He urged her on, then dashed ahead of the girl.

The winding grass-grown cart-road ended abruptly. Instantly Gilbert dropped his painting utensils and plunged into the water.

"What do you think you're doing?" he cried as he waded in and grabbed a young Finn by the neck and shoulders and flung him into the water. Gilbert drew Selma up, who had been submerged, and held her rigid in his arms.

Gasping for breath, wild-eyed, face white, lips almost purple, she grabbed his arms and clung to them desperately.

He slowly let her sink back against a huge boulder in the stream, on the side sheltered against the running water, and made for Lato, sixteen, who had suddenly left high school to find work in a textile mill, only to lose his position in a few weeks.

Scowling, deliberate, the boy clenched fists and awaited the onslaught, his face a terrible thing to see, grimaced by hate.

With swift, decisive movements Gilbert threw himself on the boy who, in white-soiled shirt and khaki trousers, up to his waist in the grey-green waters, waited. There was a sudden, fierce grappling, and the swaying of two powerful bodies. Both, in the struggle, were swept off their feet and plunged beneath the water's surface.

Gilbert had two feet of height on Lato, longer arms, and a matured, athletic body, vividly reminiscent of Y. M. C. A. days,

boyhood and college football. It was not difficult to master this untrained youth, to force his head under water, to hold it there, until he subsided.

"Go on!" Gilbert finally commanded, shoving Lato, half dead, from the water. "Go on! Beat it! And if I ever catch you treating Selma like that or assaulting any other girl, it's jail!"

Lato, water running from mouth and ears, did not turn back. With awful oaths he limped painfully away, like a whipped dog, and slunk off into the bushes.

Gilbert came ashore. Selma followed.

"Look at me!" he exclaimed, his face brightening, readjusting his soaked clothing the best he could.

"Gee! You're wonderful!"

The girl in vivid blue bathing suit reached out, grasped a hand, knelt on the stony little beach and kissed it. As swiftly she stood again.

"Well, of all things!" he exploded. "And what's that for?"

"You ought to know." Her eyes were riveted on his as though she, too, feasted on some imperishable beauty.

"Oh, that? That was nothing. Any man would have done as much."

"Not the Finns."

"Yes, Selma, many would. I know."

"Perhaps. But not the Finnish fellows around here. They don't think of girls as you do."

"As I do?"

"I mean, they wouldn't have done what you just did."

"Sure they would. Jack would have."

"Yes, maybe Jack. But no one else. I know. That's not the first time Lato has forced his attentions—or others."

"Are conditions as bad as that?"

"Worse." Her eyes filled up and ran over with pain. She moved her eyes away.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to embarrass you. I just wondered. Maybe I'd better have a talk with the sheriff."

"Wouldn't do any good." She talked, her head still lowered.

"My people aren't like your people."

"Oh, come, cheer up!"

Gilbert sat on the bank and removed shoes and stockings.

"Excuse me. But these are most annoying. I'd rather they would dry off me. I'll let the rest stay where they are. I came to paint and so I'll stay to paint."

"Going to paint Horse-Fly?"

"You bet. Your mother's idea."

"Did she tell you?" Selma's face, suffused in new interest, a rainbow light suggested by her newly radiant eyes, edged closer.

"Told Elsa, I guess. In Finnish. Elsa showed me the way." He glanced around, ready to thank her.

"Huh, she stayed until Lato started out of the water. Then she disappeared." Selma explained. "Mother knows we paddle about here. Knows we like it."

"Guess you girls have an eye for beauty."

"Wish we did. But the water's fresh and cool and it is deep enough to get wet all over. I guess that's the real reason." Selma laughed.

Gilbert observed her closely.

What a pretty little creature she was! Typical Finnish girl, perhaps, but with some vast, indescribable difference.

Hair not over-thick and not colorful enough to be either yellow or a light brown. Eyes blue, a pale water-color blue rather than a vivid Labrador blue, the small eyes peculiarly intense, their intensity more than making amends for their lack

of size. The lights in them were likewise small, fierce sometimes, sometimes metallic.

Her beauty was not in them or in her pleasantly contoured lips, but in the clear, creamy skin of her entire body. Her face now, flushed and excited, resembled a late, fall sunset, it was so radiantly colorful.

Built in a heavy mould, at eighteen one did not suspect the future's ovals. In a bathing suit, standing on the rock-strewn edge of the deep, green pool, against a background of rich, varied greenery streaked, shot through and through with blinding bursts of sunlight, her hair shining as though the sun's molten fire had been spilled upon it, she was a beautiful thing to see.

A statuette in rich and living marble, topped with a head of burnished gold, the wild flowers twining into both cheeks, the rich red of clover mingling with the lips so recently a pale purple.

As, with beauty's trained eye, he scanned her, standing poised and lovely before him, he observed the lavender-grey boulder directly behind her, where he had found her, bits of white foam mingling with the flowing green shadows around it. Instantly he had his picture. He saw it, finished, resplendent, complete, at once—in a swift, full-orbed flash.

"I'd love to paint you—sitting on that boulder over there," he suggested.

"Me? Paint me?"

"Why not? I came for a picture. I've got it. And you're in it this time. You wouldn't mind, I hope."

"Me mind? No, I should say not. I don't know how to thank you. You would like to paint my picture? You think I'm pretty enough—to go into an oil painting?"

"If I didn't think so, would I say it? You know me quite well. Am I in the habit of saying what I don't mean?"

"You're going to paint my picture? Isn't that swell!" Selma started toward the huge boulder.

"Not yet," he chuckled. "You'll have to spend the afternoon on it. So don't be in a hurry. Wait till I get my paint on the palette—and everything ready to go."

Gilbert finally got Selma in the exact position outlined in his mind, sitting, knees crooked up from the ankles, then bent back again to the waist, hands clasped on the knees, as if studying the swirling, grey-green waters glorified by the mid-afternoon sunlight that danced about here, there, everywhere, as to the constant rhythms of the ceaseless-flowing water.

He cried out in ecstasy when the moving sun caught her full figure in blazing saffron and detached it, for a few moments, from the rich, deep shadows. He worked feverishly to get the saffron color effect—and exclaimed to himself his pleasure in unexpected triumph. He had gotten the impression before the the sunlight shifted around.

All afternoon he labored.

Finally Selma, cramped, sore, but wordlessly elated, waded ashore to scan herself on canvas.

"But nobody'd ever know it was me," she pouted. "You can't tell that it's me."

"I was only getting a color effect. Any pretty girl would have done, so far as that goes."

"Huh! I still like my clothesline picture best!" she judged. "This is good, I suppose. Especially the way the water looks. But I thought you were painting my picture."

Gilbert laughed and pulled at one end of white-gold hair protruding from behind one ear, nicely dried in the late afternoon sunlight.

"Come, cheer up. Maybe I will paint your portrait some day."

"Nope! Don't want you to!" she snapped, not quite pleasantly.

Selma walked with him along the cart-path, across the pastures, back to the house and left him in front of the door.

Joyfully he hastened home, to show Evelyn his masterpiece.

She scanned it critically.

"Who's the girl?" That was her single query.

"Who cares? Just one of a thousand blondes."

"But it's Selma."

"Who knows?"

"I thought so. I trust nobody around here sees it."

"Why?"

"Scandal, my dear, scandal."

"Evelyn, don't be sensational!"

"No, Gil, dearest, just sensible. That's just the kind of thing that would set this town afire."

"But isn't it handsome?"

"Rather nice green, nice sunlight effects maybe. But if the church folks knew you painted Selma, church organist, in that rig in the woods, well—heaven have mercy upon your poor soul! Out—like a light!"

She whisked to the oven door, opened it and forked the cake she was baking.

"It's going into the front room today, to dry." Gilbert decided. "I'm not ashamed of it if you are."

"Have things your own way and be stubborn about it, too, if you like. You may find, sometime, that there's a difference in women."

With rollicking merriment Gilbert, picture held carefully between the thumbs of both hands, tramped into the front room.

AFTERNOON CALL

Friday afternoon.

Selma had dropped in at the manse on her way home from school to help Evelyn get the house in order for week-end guests from Boston.

Evelyn outlined the afternoon's duties and returned to the kitchen. Her husband was out, engaged in pastoral work.

Glancing through one kitchen window Evelyn spoke one word—"Darn!" Then—"What a time to have callers! When I'm so busy!"

Down the road bustled a plump, rosy little creature.

The bleak, stiff, old-fashioned hat with the black feather, the thing resembling a band-box camouflaged and decorated, the hat itself disclosed identity at once.

But the fat, bustling figure, so wide and luxuriant about the waist, so small about the ankles as to leave one wondering how such slight stems could support so full-blown a flower, its physical over-supply augmented by too many clothes, a winter's supply in summer time, approached.

The precise, lordly waddling of the body, a certain officious demeanor to head, hat, shoulders, hips, stride—well, here came Mrs. Wally Rutgers, wife of the deacon, mother of Sam, treasurer of the Ladies' Aid Society.

In another moment the parsonage knocker was made use of—lustily. Evelyn was immediately at the door.

"Why, come right in, Mrs. Rutgers. So glad you called! Come right in."

With many unrelated, jerky little movements to face, shoulders, hands, feet, the rotund, officious creature bustled into the front room. She fussed with her hat, pulled out two huge, long hat-pins and placed the hat on the parlor table.

"It's all right there, I guess. My head, it bothers me a great deal. I can't bear any weight upon it at all, for long." Evelyn helped her to extricate herself from the long lavender and black coat. Mrs. Rutgers committed herself, directly, to the soft and luxuriant confines of the over-stuffed parlor rocker, member of a rather outmoded parlor suite, but a handsome piece of furniture.

The lady slid her fat little person against the comfortable back, her short legs with the tiny ankles, just barely reaching to the floor.

Her hands fussed a few moments with her grey-white hair, patting it down, smoothing it out, rearranging a pug, fixing a hair-pin or two to better advantage, wheezing all the while, tuckered out by the effort to climb the hill, her feet pedaling the large chair back and forth.

The face, red as poppies, with a burnt-red poppy-effect, a redness without particular lustre, was swathed in an ample lavender handkerchief, lingering along the thin, wide lips, curving about the small, marble chin, swept about the neck, alive with tiny, curling white hairs. Next the glasses came off, and were promptly cleaned and returned to the plump, pert little nose.

"Wally's in Norwich today with the carriage," she puffed, now smoothing out the lace collar on her dress—one reminding Evelyn of the ornate, huge collars the eighteenth century Kings of England loved to parade. "But it was such an exceptional day I was minded to go calling, carriage or not."

"Glad you did. You have not called on us for some time."

"Over a year, to be exact. But I felt it was my bounden duty to make this effort." Another sweep of the handkerchief across the poppy-cheeks. A rich, verdant perfume rushed upon the room, even alluring, nearly voluptuous. Perspiration and roses on the front porch.

Evelyn knew that she was only expected to listen; so she kept largely quiet on the divan, leaning intently forward.

"I wouldn't have made this effort even though Wally has been upset for some time. But now that the story has somehow leaked out and is running all over town, I feel it to be my bounden duty to have a heart-to-heart talk with you. You see, I'm a church worker, and have the good of the cause at heart."

"Why, yes, to be sure, Mrs. Rutgers. You are very faithful in church attendance and at the Ladies' Aid meetings. What seems to be the matter?"

"Seems to be the matter? That's hardly the phrase, Mrs. Chalmers. Things are going decidedly wrong with the church—with the pastor!"

"With the church?"

"Yes. Haven't you noticed our audiences the past six months?"

"Not particularly."

"Well, you should! Haven't you noticed the riff-raff that's attending church? Finns, Polaks, Italians, a Negro family and all the objectionable denizens of town? Why, Wally and me—and Sam—would hardly recognize our Sunday morning audiences now. It's preposterous!"

"Gilbert is endeavoring to build up the church, Mrs. Rutgers. He said some time ago he was going to fill the pews if he had to get people in from Jewett City."

"He can't build our church with that kind of material. Polaks, Negroes, Italians, Finns!"

There was a sudden, terrific racket upstairs, like a half-raised window crashing down to the sill, a broom and dust pan clattering to the floor.

"Mercy!" The fat little body jumped in the chair. "Mercy! Whats that?" The visitor became tense, the grey little eyes snapping, staring out through the higher circle of the glasses—for long-range vision.

"Selma likely. She is helping me this afternoon."

"Oh, that girl. Finnish, too, isn't she. A little better sort, perhaps. But a clumsy thing, isn't she? All Finns are clumsy things. Wally says so, too. And Sam. I couldn't bear to have a clumsy creature like that fussing around my house."

"Selma is quite a capable girl, Mrs. Rutgers."

"Perhaps she is, to you. Anyway, to get on with my story. Certain members of the congregation are finding fault with this influx of the objectionables. And, if I were you, I would mention to your husband the feeling of certain leaders in the church."

"You really don't care to have the church audiences increased?" Evelyn ventured, running a hand across her forehead. "I should think the church would commend Gilbert's industry and sincerity of purpose."

"Not increased with that type of material!"

"But if there is no other available!"

"There is other available!"

"Not a great amount, Mrs. Rutgers. The people of foreign extraction, especially the Scandinavian, are buying up all the farms about here. They are getting in by the scores. As soon as a farm is for sale they buy it up. We must win these people to the church, or the church is done for."

"And, pray tell me, who said that?" The head was cocked to one side in indignant protest, almost an unassailable gesture. "Who could say such a pretentious thing?"

"But there are only a handful of old Yankees now in the church. When they die, then what?"

"You haven't answered my question. I want to know who you happen to be quoting."

"My husband and Mrs. John Cummings. Also Nan Thurston."

"I thought so. Who is Nan Thurston? A nobody. Mrs. Cummings, though she has money, has few friends. As for the pastor, he is very young. Which brings me to the second matter. He should learn to heed one Biblical injunction. The one that says: Avoid all appearances of evil."

"Just what are you getting at?" Evelyn's voice was in a crescendo, a rising arc of vitality and color.

"He shouldn't be seen out with a drunken Finn at midnight. Mercy! What's that?" Again the rotund frame jumped almost clean off the chair. The eyes slid up and over the top rim of the glasses.

"Sounds like Selma broke a dish in the kitchen sink. "Excuse me a moment, please."

"Certainly."

"I was right," Evelyn commented in a moment. "The girl is quite careless today."

"Maybe you'll believe my judgment on other matters. It would be wise to keep your husband in nights. That Jack Kivella is a moron. Everybody says."

Mrs. Rutgers, glaring frequently out of the window, chuckled and smiled, from ear to ear. She never laughed. She either smiled or chuckled.

"There goes Obadiah," she mentioned. "Going down to sit an hour with his Violet. Two of a kind. Old bachelor—and anemic spinster. She's been expecting a proposal for thirty years. Summer and winter. He always calls on her, I hear, and just sits, spits tobacco in the cuspidor, talks when talked to

and goes back home again. Did you ever hear anything so strange and amusing in all your born days?" Renewed chuckling, the eyes losing their harsh, severe points of light, almost a kind expression suffusing the poppy-red.

"They are a peculiar couple."

"I should say so. Poor Obadiah. Wally asked him the other day how he felt. He replied— fair to middlin. Wally asked him how Violet was. Fair to middlin'. How did he like the weather? Same thing. Then Wally up and asked him how his potatoes were coming along. He plants a piece in the Joyce lot. Again—fair to middlin'. Wally asked him if he knew anything else to say. 'Not today,' he answered and, hands behind his back, kept right on up the road. Now, wasn't that odd?"

"Obadiah is always like that."

"And here comes Alma. Fancy a woman whistling like a man! Well named, Manning, I always say. Awful bold-like, I should say. The other day she said she wished God would send lightning and burn the tavern to cinders. Still has President McKinley's full-size face in the front window, 'cause he was agin License. Never took it down. Won't, she says. Rather loud talker, too. I don't wonder no man would have her. Mercy! She'd wear out a dozen!"

Alma, innocent of all this, strode deliberately by the house, down the cement road.

"Hello, Alma."

"Hello."

'Great piece of weather we're havin'."

"Fair to middlin'."

Mrs. Rutgers jumped again in her chair, her poppy-red purpling to pansies.

"Well, I must be going!" she announced, venturing her wide, ample heft to the spindling ankles again. She glanced

toward the study door. She stood motionless.

Evelyn trembled. She had been hoping and praying the past hour that this wouldn't happen. She had forgotten.

The old lady looked under her glasses, over them, around them, her face losing hold of its purple and beginning to look like summer's faded clover. She resolutely approached the study-doorway, looked sharp up, removed her white-gold glasses, swept them decidedly back upon the pert, turned-up nose, retreated again to the center of the room.

"I don't know what this world's coming to! Demoralizing youth right in the manse! Please help me get my things on. I must be getting along. I'm glad Wally didn't come with me. If he had seen that thing—he'd have taken his letter from the church at once!" She thrust a thumb toward the painting of a woodland pool, its constant water nymph.

"Why, the girl's bare-naked, except for a stitch of bathing suit!" Mrs. Rutgers exploded. "The hussy! Mercy! Now what?"

"Its Selma shaking the carpet at the side door," Evelyn explained.

"What an infernal racket she's making about it. I hope that's not one of our church girls, Mrs. Chalmers." Mrs. Rutgers pointed again toward the painting.

"My husband is the artist in the family. I never go sketching with him."

"It would be even indecent to paint you in such a rig. I must prevail upon Wally to speak to the pastor. He is so young and unaware of the devious paths of the world. Dear! But these are awful wicked and pernicious times! I shall feel it to be my bounden duty to speak seriously to Wally. My coat, please."

Evelyn slipped into the hallway to get it. Mrs. Rutgers fixed the hat herself, pinning it jerkily to her grey head, wheezing, puffing into her coat, flinging her arms into the sleeves

with surprising agility, trying to smooth its folds down over an incredible expanse of hips.

"Well, good afternoon," she snapped. "And—remember what I called about. The two matters. And—better put that picture right in the fire. Remember, the Bible says—Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

The ample, officious little figure bustled along the walk to the road in jerky, precise, amusing and ominous retreat.

NOT FOR SALE

It was the good or bad fortune of Mr. Kivella to own one of the many almost forgotten old New England farms, off on a dirt road, hidden among the elms, maples and pines. He had managed to buy it, some twenty years back, when a young, enthusiastic immigrant from Finland. So many acres for pasture land and planting, a useless swamp, a dwindling wood lot, smoke-house, pig sty, weather-bleached barns.

Gilbert called at the house one sweltering August afternoon, while making a few pastoral calls in the neighborhood. He still tried to carry out one sentence learned in the seminary course on Pastoral Theology: "Study book plates in the morning; study door plates in the afternoon." The Kivellas, naturally, boasted no door plate.

Gilbert found Selma, her mother and Jack in the large barn behind the house, the three sweating profusely in a heat-wave temperature, stowing hay into the loft.

"Greetings, Jack."

"Hello, Revvy."

"How are you making it?"

"Not so bad."

"How are the cattle?"

"Oh—fair."

"The crops?"

"Good enough."

"The market?"

"Rotten!"

Jack forked a heap of hay from the wagon to Selma on the barn loft floor. She caught the hay with a pitchfork and relayed it on to her mother high up under the barn roof, who stowed it away. Jack paused a moment, struck boldly at an aggravating fly and then again drove his fork into the load.

"Doing better than last year?"

"'Bout the same."

Gilbert knew what this meant. Jack had told him, a while back—confidentially—that it had cost his father a dollar for every day he had worked his farm. He went behind approximately \$365.00.

"Same crops as last year?"

"Nope. Think we raise cabbages, take them to market and bring back again, cannot leave on consignment? Or sprouts? I let thousand plants rot in fields last fall. No market. Too many middle-man. Crating too high. Same with cauliflower."

"Got to do better than that!" spoke up Selma, dashing an arm across her face, wiping off perspiration.

"Too bad," the mother, high in the loft, added.

Gilbert waited until the load had been disposed of. Jack vaulted from the wagon. Selma and her mother clambered down the loft ladder.

"Want to see the crops?" Jack ventured.

"Sure."

"Got more carrot, beet this year. Planted large bed strawberry. Set out asparagus plant, more potato. Three best crops here, they say."

Gilbert scanned the other's sun-bronzed countenance.

"You mean, you aren't curtailing production this year? Just shifting around a bit?"

"Right. Cannot give up, can we? Once you stop farming, all done! All done! Nor does Gover'ment tell me how many potato I raise!"

Gilbert observed a pile of new lumber in the rear of the stable.

"What's that for?"

"Another hen house. Selma, she does good with eggs. Not much. But I think she do good. My own timber—cut from wood lot. Got it sawed at mill."

They passed a pile of fine-looking cord wood.

"All set for winter, eh?"

But that not for us. We sell that. We use scratch wood, odds, ends behind the big chicken coop over there." He pointed.

"Look at string beans," he declared, gesticulating to a row of wilted, lacy-brown leaves. "Mexican beetle. And last two bad winter kill peach, apple tree. Blight hit tomato vine and potato, if you not spray a lot. Too much rain spoil grape this year. See!" Jack stopped and pointed to a huge grape vine clambering leisurely over a stone wall.

"City people say that the farmer is getting the breaks these days!" Gilbert suggested. "Something to plant and somewhere to plant it on. You eat, anyway."

"Yep, we eat last year, work like old Harry, lose dollar a day! Time was once when only lazy loafer go behind. Now—work head off—still go behind. I think—sometime—be better to loaf and not earn than work and not earn."

"Then why not take things easy?"

"Take things easy?" Jack's brilliant blue eyes heaped with wonder. "Cannot do that. Always work. Pa, he say that this old place see better time, long time ago, see better time yet. Maybe he right. Old Jim—our horse—he die in harness. Pa say that the way with us."

A shrill, vigorous voice penetrated the mid-afternoon

silence. Both swung about. Mrs. Kivella was calling Jack across the field and beckoning him to return to the house.

"Want me?" Jack cupped his hands to his mouth.

"Y-e-a. That man . . . is here . . . again."

"Rats!" Gilbert heard Jack spit out as he turned back to the farmhouse. Jack walked a few moments in silence, then risked conversation.

"Some big shot from York State. Want to buy this place. Third time he come this week. Pa say no. Ma say no. I say no. Still he come. Nobody want to sell."

"Don't want to sell?" Gilbert inquired in amazement, recalling his statements the past hour.

"Nope! Do not want to sell!"

Surprised, wondering what it was all about, Gilbert followed Jack to the house.

An elegant limousine, shining like a mirror, stood parked by the front door. It had not ventured into the cluttered back yard, this day devoid of clothes or clothesline. The weather-bleached, clumsy old truck that Jack used for marketing purposes, obstructed the driveway.

A man twiddling a thin, polished cane, in immaculate palm-beach togs, spats and all, withdrew his scrutiny from the squat old farmhouse and motioned to his chauffeur in the car and with nervous steps approached Jack.

"Your father is not at home?"

"Gone to Norwich."

"Very nice day."

"Yep. Great hay weather."

Jack introduced Gilbert to the aristocratic stranger. Then, naturally, he withdrew from conversation.

"Have you folks considered my proposition seriously?" the stranger queried, adjusting his glasses to better advantage

between his eyes. "I would like a definite answer at your earliest convenience."

"I do not think we sell."

Jan, boy of eleven, clad in shirt and trousers, appeared, also a younger brother. Mrs. Kivella, Selma and Dagma and Elsa gathered about the talkers.

"But you said you were running behind!" the sparkling little man interposed.

"Did I? I forget."

"Yes, you did. Then—sell it! In big business we always get rid of a white elephant as soon as possible!"

"What you mean by white elephant?"

"Something one has that one can't get rid of."

"But we could sell, if we want, to you. But we do not want. This place has two hundred seventy five good, productive acre, in good time."

"Precisely! But, see here, young man, these are not good times! " The little man paused to heighten the effect of his strategy.

"Better time will come," Jack owned. "Everybody say. Water go out—water come in. When good time come, we make lot of money."

"When it does!" the sparkling man echoed emphatically, digging up a weed with his cane, striking it from the soil with a fortunately aimed blow.

"Read in paper that good time come soon, not far off. See in York State paper."

Jack spoke with heartening certainty. Selma, bright-eyed, new dress on, stood proudly beside him. The mother nodded assent with her blonde, large head. The children thronged their mother.

"But, my good young man, don't you know that New England has changed? Once this was a business and manu-

facturing center and a farming community. Now all this has changed. Mills are moving South. The farmers have migrated West. New England, in time, will be the nation's playground!"

"Playground?" spoke up the old lady, her face squinted against the sun, her toil-hardened sinews full of surprise and disdain. "Playground?"

"Why, haven't you been keeping up with the times? Don't you follow trends? Certainly, my good people! New England will become the nation's playground. Summer and winter sports. An ideal locale. Business in the South. Agriculture in the West. The East the recreational and cultural resort of the nation. A glorious future! Why, most certainly, my good people!" The stranger flourished a silk handkerchief from his pocket and softly patted his lips. "Most certainly!"

"I do not think," the old lady commented, shaking her head, her words emphatic.

The stranger blushed, stammered, coughed., made use of the available silken cloth again. "You doubt my word?"

"We think you make—mistake," Jack replied, taking his mother's part, swinging the conversation back to its proper channel. "New England—this place—never go down like that."

"Go down? Go down?" The rotund little man seized at the words instantly. "Don't we need play in our lives?"

"Play? Maybe sometimes. But work most. There will always be work to do in these hills. Much work. Many cattle. Good crop."

"I don't wish to cause bad feeling," the stranger continued. "As I said the other day, I will offer spot cash, seven thousand, for this place. It would make an ideal summer place. The wife likes it and there would be plenty opportunity for hunting deer and coons in the fall and ample space for week-end parties."

"Mister, I do not know much about you—but we would not care to sell farm for such thing," Jack pledged stoutly. Gilbert marveled at his brave, sure handling of the situation.

Jack continued.

"Mister, this is the best stretch of land for twenty mile. You find that very few rock in field. It would not be right to let all this go back to brush. For long time Pa make money here."

The stranger gesticulated with his cane, suggesting an arc in the air.

"You people are actually land poor. All these acres aren't worth taxes as farm land. Have you ever been West?"

"Nopel!"

"I thought not. You can't compete with the West."

"But have Eastern farmer—do Eastern farmer ask gov'ment for aid past three year? May-be Eastern farmer have to grow crop for whole nation some day."

"Foolishness! But it is useless to argue. Will you sell or not?"

"We do not want to sell," Jack answered, deliberately.

"This is my final offer."

"We keep farm."

"You'll come to your senses when it is too late. Good-day!"

The rotund, immaculate man whisked to the elegant limousine, turned back, hesitated a moment before entering, then swung open the car door and disappeared. The chauffeur started the engine, threw the clutch into first, second, third, and in a cloud of dust the car vanished.

The Kivellas watched the settling dust along the road. Mystified, amazed by the revelations of a casual call, Gilbert made haste to excuse himself.

"I must be going."

Jack stretched out his hand. Gilbert found himself gripped in a vice of steel.

"You think we were wrong?" he questioned.

"I think you were grand."

"You mean that?"

"More than I can say."

Jack's voice choked; he let go of the pastor's hand and turned abruptly away. He took a few, long, resolute steps toward the truck, then swung back. He waved a bare, bronzed arm.

"Call again. Any time."

"Be glad to."

"That goes for me, too."

Selma reached fingers to her mouth, her head tilted, her eyes flashing up to his, plunging into them, revelling, sporting in them, losing their intense white lights in them. "I wish you could call—every day." Frank, serious, beautiful tonecolor. "Honest."

"Don't believe it."

"Don't have to."

"Good-bye, everyone!"

Gilbert started down the road, the dust well laid again.

"See you in church!"

He arched his neck about.

Selma waved to him. That instant she whirled quickly around. Her mother had disappeared. Jack cranked the truck. She flung a kiss down the road—a swift, graceful, elusive gesture, then pivoted about swiftly and raced, hard as she could, around the back of the house.

DAY DREAMS

Selma sat on a packing crate peeling potatoes in the sun.

Jan had dropped a pail alongside of her, heaping-full of potatoes, drawn from the deep, wide cellar. Paring knife in hand, dish pan on her knees, she dropped the peeled potatoes into it, the skins falling back into the pail.

She had now graduated from high school, four months ago. Her enthusiasm for nursing had somewhat cooled. A letter of inquiry to a Boston Hospital had not been answered. Temporary house work for the summer had petered out. The mills in Norwich, Jewett City and Plainfield were closed, closing or running on short time. "No Help Wanted" was the inescapable sign-board discovered everywhere.

In a cheap gingham dress of blue and white, her hair spilling about her shoulders like a heap of autumn gold, one bare leg crossed over another, Selma peeled potatoes in the back yard, a new clothesline over her head, a few pairs of stockings hanging in the sun to dry, for Sunday.

With slow, well-trained movements she reached for the potatoes, one by one, rubbed them with a cloth, dipped them in a pail of water recently drawn from the well and curved the knife blade over them and around them—almost with mathematical precision.

Jack cranked the truck and started from the yard with a load of cord wood. Her father, with horse and plough, was

clattering over to the north lot, to plough, already for next spring. The other children, all except Jan, who was needed at home, were in school. The mother was making pickles.

Hens—Plymouth Rocks—White Leghorns—Rhode Island Reds—clucked, fluttered, fought and scolded about the yard; geese cackled in the woodland a short distance away; cows mooed in the pasture across the road; sometimes a car, the baker, the laundry man, whirled up or down the road.

Who can tell what a girl is thinking when she toys with dreams, apparently peeling potatoes?

Who suspects where her thoughts are faring; through what labyrinthine tangles, into what far, fond, invigorating experiences? To all outward appearances Selma was helping her mother—a detached, colorful point of vision in a noisy, cluttered back yard, in due and proper manner doing the day's nearest duty.

Selma, in strict truth, was not peeling potatoes, though her hands fulfilled an outward duty with a fair measure of success. She was building dream-worlds, seeking to hew out for herself a radiant, interesting future and wondering how she could do it.

Sunshine and shadow flitted irregularly back and forth across her inner world of mind even as the slowly rising September sun moved, like a weaver's shuttle, across the blue-white gingham dress, in conflict with shadow.

"Lato," she was saying to herself, "Lato would marry me. Bet he would; he's wild about me. But he has no ambitions. He's lazy. He hangs around the West Village boys, shoots crap, lies and goes to the tavern every Saturday night.

"Jim Redfield, he tried to date me up in high school. American. He doesn't think of me as a Finn. But he goes out with too many girls. I couldn't ever be quite sure of his promises. I'm afraid he could never settle down to home-life with one woman.

"Ignace. Polish boy. Lives down the street. Nice looking. But a drudge. He doesn't like movies, dances, music or such things. Doesn't believe in church. To him a woman is so many pounds of flesh, to work with. He couldn't ever be romantic."

"Petya. Russian boy in Norwich. Has an ugly scar on his left cheek. I just couldn't think of getting up every morning and looking at that every day for half a century.

"George—the LaVolla boy. Too young, Finnish? Yes. But he is Lato's friend. Probably the same kind—hard-fisted, stuck up, nasty disposition."

Selma, apparently peeling potatoes, went through the mechanical motions, while a procession of masculine faces passed. Each potato symbolized a boy's face; sometimes the very shape and size aided the hallucination; but she was not seeing work; she was seeing the invisible. She conjured up images and as suddenly obliterated them.

None of these images interested her. Only one intrigued her mind for long.

"Now as for the minister," she was thinking, "he's different. He loves these fields, the trees, the woods, the streams. Not just to plow and harrow and cut up. He even sees magical, wonderful pictures in clotheslines. He likes books, church music, the common people. He has a temper? Yes. But what good is a man or steel without temper? He is tall, important-looking, stands behind a desk on a high platform and is called 'Reverend.'

"He wears good clothes, always in good press, shaves every day, keeps the hair off his neck, likes children—and has none. It's a pity! A young man with a good home should have children. What will happen to a home if it has no children?

"His voice, too, it is pleasant to listen to. I don't think I would ever tire of listening to it. The name—Gilbert—is a nice

name. I don't think I would ever grow sick of hearing it. It is so much superior to Lato, Petya, Ignace or even George.

"But Gilbert is married. He is married to Evelyn. And Evelyn is rather pretty with her vandyke-brown hair, luxuriant soft hair, black snapping eyes, clear white skin with good color in both cheeks. And she wears nice clothes and wears them well. Smaller than me, a bit slenderer, too.

"She isn't built like me to have children, though. She is ten years older. That means something.

"Divorce is wrong, the Bible says. Once Gilbert preached against it. Yet—if Evelyn won't make herself a good and proper wife, should he keep married to her? Does the Bible teach birth-control? Isn't there something in the Bible about being fruitful, filling the land with children? Didn't I read it once in Sunday School? Didn't old Mr. Jennings say once in prayer meeting that barrenness among women was a reproach in Bible times?"

Selma was getting near the bottom of the pail, the pan in her lap well filled with the dinner's edibles, the hens strutting about the back yard, picking up unseen bits of almost anything, the mother's huge, friendly shadow falling athwart her precisely moving knife from time to time.

"The boys around here aren't the kind I like. What chance have I to marry one like the kind I see in the movies? How am I ever to have a lovely home with fine things—radio, car, piano, furniture, rugs, shower baths?

"Gilbert may become famous. What of Lato and the others? They will desire my body; what do they care about my soul? They will use my hands to scrub and dig; what do they care about my invisible dreams?

"Lato only cares about pictures that aren't decent to see. He carries them around in his pockets, shows them, grins, cracks dirty jokes—pictures Jack told my mother about. So

she has forbidden him to come to the house any more. Lato doesn't care for sunsets, snow scenes, clothesline paintings. He calls these kind—crazy, no good.

"Gilbert is different. He sees another kind of beauty—beauty in May squalls, snow banks, autumn foliage, in the big grey boulder at Horse-Fly. He sees what other people never dream of seeing. Some day he will be a great man and sell his pictures for thousands of dollars. The world will love his things and want to see the world just as he sees it.

"He has pictures of girls, too. He has painted them in pictures. But they are not like Lato's girls. Gilbert seems to worship girls, adore them, to make girls glorious. He transfigures them. Lato talks about them with low, vulgar words. Gilbert talks about them with radiant face and with a beautiful light in his eyes."

The last potato—Green Mountain stock—was in her fingers. The sunlight bathed it in a transparent pool of brilliancy. A boisterous rooster swept ceremoniously by her bare feet.

There was a sudden, vicious fluttering behind her. Selma lurched around—and rose to her feet, trembling. She screamed and dropped everything, the last potato falling to the ground. She overturned the pail of black water, the freshly peeled potatoes spilled into the dirt and Selma ran for the house.

Jan rushed up from the cellar.

"What is it?" he called.

"The snake. Big, black snake!"

"Where?"

"Over by the chopping block. But he's gone now. Slid back into the woods."

"Geel! You girls are cowards!" Jan dropped back into the cellar.

Shaking, confused, the blood swimming like seas of flame

through her veins, Selma cautiously approached the cauliflower crate she had used as a chair. Laboriously she gathered up the soiled potatoes into the dish pan, grumbling, scolding.

Lastly she picked from the ground the unpared potato and, staring at it as though an evil omen, threw it, hard as she could, into the brush, where she believed the snake had last been seen.

"Damn thing!" she cried, passionately, glaring hatred and defiance at the vanished tormentor.

"Selma!"

The mother stood in the little back porch doorway.

"You awful slow. Hurry. Bring in potato!" She beckoned to the girl, glanced about the yard, looked toward the hen-coops, then swept back into the house.

"All—right," Selma answered in petulant, angry drawl. "Don't be in such a hurry."

MONEY MATTERS

While Selma peeled potatoes and dared to dream of roseate, incredible things, Gilbert found himself grappling tremendous and baffling forces that he could not hope to overcome. Both, for some peculiar, inscrutable reason, were chasing futility.

One morning Anzelm, the recently married, attractive Polish youth, who had joined the church because a minister showed vital human interest in his deepest desires, ventured out into the manse's back yard garden where Gilbert labored. The pastor was digging a few late turnips and carrots from the white-frost ground. The morning sun made the labor particularly pleasant.

Anzelm, a medium-sized, muscular youth with a winning, radiant face, an aristocratic air to his manners and ways, yet with that certain naive childishness that characterizes Polish peasants across the water and here, walked resolutely up to the pastor. He stood for a moment, hands in his pockets, face shadowed, eyes lowered, a mannerism that prepared Gilbert for unwelcome news.

In hesitant, rambling manner Anzelm began to get out a few words.

"Didn't come to church last Sunday," Anzelm confessed.

"So I observed. Missed you and Anna; anything wrong?"

"Can't afford to."

"Why, what's the matter?" Gilbert abandoned the garden spade and gave his full attention to his parishioner.

"Mill closed down last week. The one in Jewett City, where I've been working. Anna only gets three days at the loom in Plainfield. How are we going to get along on that? How can we go to the movies, go to the shore, go to church?"

Gilbert was aware of the serious conditions in New London and Windham County.

The papers had carried recently the story of mills locked up, the machinery auctioned off, the dwelling houses owned by the mills falling under the hammer to the highest bidder. In Jewett City, Norwich, Plainfield, Moosup, Danielson, Taftville, Dayville, Goodyear, Attawaugan, Putnam.

"Can't give my pledge." Anzelm's voice indicated pain. "I told Mr. Rutgers I'd give ten cents a Sunday. Isn't much. But it's something. But I can't give it now."

"Well, come to service anyway," Gilbert encouraged. "Worship with us. Meet with us. Money isn't everything."

"But Anna and I don't want to come unless we can give." Frank, unashamed Anzelm. Gilbert loved the youth for his clean, sweet honesty. He was always like this.

"Religion isn't money; it's the worship of God and fellowship with one another. Those who have money will be glad to pay the bills for those who haven't. That's what the Good Book says. 'The strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.' "

"Anna and I wouldn't feel right about coming if we couldn't pay anything. My brother, Ignace, hasn't had any work for over a year. My friend, Johnnie, has been out of work a long time. He and Mary broke up house-keeping after having been married a year. He's gone back to his folks—she to her's. I hope nothing like that happens to us."

Anzelm looked confused. His face colored. He had to strive for the words.

"I prayed hard the past weeks that the mill I work in wouldn't close down; but it did. Why was that? You said that we didn't get things because we didn't pray, one Sunday. I prayed and still didn't get. Why was that?"

Gilbert argued, reasoned, pleaded with Anzelm, but the honest, bewildered youth, unblest, uncheered, soon turned grimly away, his face a study in sepia, his eyes bereaved of their generally radiant lights, his heart full of fear.

Less than an hour later Mr. Rutgers came trudging down the road. Gilbert spied him from the garden lot and started around the house to meet him.

Wally Rutgers, church treasurer, deacon, member of the Official Board, was no taller than his wife, considerably smaller, which matter was distinctly to his advantage. The figure almost resembled a walking plank; it had no hips at all. The over-size legs, the under-size chest resolved the general effect of the figure into one single width, from head to foot. This was the impression one received, observing the leisurely proceeding man on the road. Never in his life did he shift into second gear.

Strength was strategically added to the weak, under-nourished figure by the use of thick, heavy sweaters, a mackinaw, knee-high, woodsman's boots, heavy, baggy trousers. Tobacco juice, always in evidence about the mouth, dimly reminiscent of Obadiah, added stern, sharp lines of masculinity.

The red, girlish cheeks were amusingly framed in a black, brave blur where a beard might have grown forcefully, provided Wally had given it half a chance. The black, twisty moustache hid what must have been lips of fragile femininity. The hair, too, was voluminous and unbent by the weight of

years, struggling out beneath a grey cap for a breath of fresh air and a bit of sunlight.

Gilbert rejoiced to see the rather amusing and ominous figure. His salary had fallen on evil times, steadily slumping. He knew that a fat, pleasant, white, sealed envelope would be forthcoming. Otherwise Wally Rutgers would not be tramping the roads at this hour of the day.

"Good morning, Mr. Rutgers." Gilbert saluted the slowly proceeding creature, whose motions, though slow, were not, unless unduly aroused, jerky and bizarre as his wife's.

"Good morning."

Rutgers stopped on the cement walk and reached with ceremonious dignity and with a certain auspicious heavy breathing, into his hind pant's pocket.

"Thought mebbe you'd be needin' this. Better have it. Mebbe some time before I can scrape the next payment together." A smile. The red cheeks drew back and scattered themselves. Irregular teeth put in sudden, glaring appearance, a glitter of gold in one top aperture. The little man's voice, as always, with a low, unmusical softness.

"Thank you, Mr. Rutgers. The money sure will come in handy."

"S'pose it will. But go easy on it. Mills shutting down. These are bad times. Farmers getting little or nothing for their crops. Taxes are on the up and up. Old folks dying off. The young laboring for little or nothing. Better go easy. Money's coming in awful poor."

"Isn't there anything we can do to raise money?"

"Not much. People can't give what they haven't got. Tom McArthur told me last week he couldn't give all his pledge this year. Taxes gone up on his place almost double, 'cause he put in a few improvements. Finns and Polaks, they're buying up

all the farms. Communists, most of 'em. Don't believe we'll have a meetin' house here a great while."

"Are conditions really so discouraging?"

"I'm just disclosin' my mind to you."

Almost reluctantly the treasurer handed over the envelope. His small, blue eyes, peering through spectacles, followed its journey interestedly until swallowed up in a huge palm and deposited into a shirt-pocket.

"And our congregations lately haven't been as good as common. Those two Polaks you married don't come any more. That affects the treasury, too." Mr. Rutgers shuffled as if to leave, yet unwilling to leave without a pretentious parting shot.

"Anzelm isn't working and he doesn't like to come when unable to give. He has just been here. We've lost heavily in deaths the past year. Mrs. Somers was a fine worker in the church and Mrs. Arthur Jones. I don't know how the ladies will manage to get along without her help. That was a terrible blow to the church and the Ladies' Aid. Charlie Davidson, the Hartford insurance man,— we shall miss his annual gift, too. And above all, Mrs. Esther Brent."

"Things are askew. The young folks don't seem to get hold of religious affairs these days," the treasurer continued. "They are especially weak on money matters."

"Our best young people move to the city. They go into religious work and join large city parishes. Alice went to Boston last year, Robert to Springfield, Charlotte to Washington. That is what discourages rural pastors. We obscure pastors are building the big city parishes all the time. They only come back to us—to have us bury them."

"But the farms are all being bought up around here," the treasurer interposed.

"By whom? You just said, by the Finnish and Polish

people. Right! It will take years to win them to our American institutions and churches."

"If . . . we . . . want . . . them," Rutgers added, looking almost defiantly at the eager young countenance above him.

"If we want them? Of course we want them!"

"Some of us don't! We don't want to bring the cattle to church, do we?"

"Cattle? Is that quite the word?"

"That was the word I used."

"Deacon Rutgers, I'm afraid you don't know much about the teachings of the New Testament."

"I don't, eh? I've taught Bible Class for years, young man. You're the one who doesn't know the Bible. Every time you preach you raise my risibles. You make me want to get up and leave the church!"

Gilbert found it difficult, for the moment, to suppress humor. Rutgers' face burned scarlet. His sudden, whole-souled animation, the jerky, awkward gestures, the intensity of his spirit, made him appear ridiculous. Gilbert could only think of a wet, infuriated bantam rooster strutting about the barn yard as though he would conquer the world!

"You'll take that grin off your face one of these days! Mark my words! And not so far ahead, either. Mark my words! We've got our fill of city fellers comin' to Hill Grove and tryin' to make the town over. You'll be sorry for your obstreperous ways! Mark my words!"

Gilbert stared at the infuriated treasurer, mouth agape, wonder, surprise, pain, humor still grimacing his usually firmly set countenance. It was as though he said: "Well, of all things! I never expected this from you, like this. What a spirit from a deacon of the church of Jesus Christ. Hmmm. Must Judas always carry the bag?"

All this could be read in the facial contortion of the pastor

as he listened, shocked, astounded.

"You jest wait and see!"

The little man edged away, turned about and proceeded, not quite leisurely, not quite hurriedly, up the street. Again Gilbert thought of the stiff, wide, proceeding, ever-proceeding plank.

"You shouldn't have angered him," Evelyn complained at the front door. "Was that—diplomacy?"

"I don't see how I angered him."

"You sure managed to, all right. I was watching through the parlor window. His wife got going the other day; now he gets all stirred up. You'd better call on them and get things fixed up before there's a rift in the church."

"Wouldn't do any good."

"Gilbert, I hope you aren't getting obstinate!"

"Obstinate? Do you think I'm going to let him call the Kivellas, Anzelm, and Anna, and many more—cattle? Never! What do you think I am—a shrinking violet, a coward, a hypocrite?"

"But he's the church treasurer!" Evelyn's voice became hard, severe. "Want us to starve this winter?"

"Oh, I'll get money, never fear."

"A very gullible creature you are, Gilbert. If I were you I'd do something about the menacing situation at once!"

"If I were you. That's what everyone says. But there's one thing I still reserve completely for my own convenience. It's about all I've saved from these regimented, enslaved times. And that is—the freedom of my own personal choices. That I will never surrender."

"Gilbert!" Evelyn's face burst in autumnal beauty, a wild, wind-tossed beauty. "Gilbert—has any one ever called you—incurable?"

"Not until now. It's a long, hard word. But, my dear, remember this. There's a vast, vast difference between selfish stubbornness and sincere religious loyalty to one's basic beliefs."

With that he bolted around the house to the garden.

TO MARKET

Gilbert had an errand at Lew O'Brien's for the Ladies' Aid Society. Would Mrs. O'Brien prepare a large dish of creamed cauliflower for the Agricultural Society Supper in the chapel, the next evening?

Along the road Gilbert met Obadiah. The tall, bony creature with the grey-fuzz face, hands clasped behind him, was talking to little Sonny Brown.

The little fellow, a crude, wooden cart in hand, moved back and forth while Obadiah talked to him.

"What kind of a cart be that one?"

"That's not a cart, Mister, that's a auto-mo-beel."

"Speed wagon, eh?"

"It's a scorcher. Goes sixty miles an hour."

Obadiah turned away a moment, to relieve himself of a cud, the possibilities of which he had evidently exhausted. The child noticed.

"Mama tells me to throw my gum away, too, after a while. You like gum?" The bright, flickering dark eyes studied the angular, bent over figure in frayed blue sweater and overalls.

"My kind! Sure do, child. Nothin' like havin' somethin' ta hold on to. You like gum?"

"I guess I do. But I like to make a big noise with mine. My brother showed me how to. You don't never make a big noise with yourn, do you?"

"Reckon not."

"Yourn is a different kind of color, too, ain't it? A brown color."

Obadiah did not answer readily. He fidgeted a while, his hands in his hind pant's pockets, then drew them forth again.

"I know!" the little fellow chirped triumphantly. "'Cause I see it on your chin. Mama said once to a lady that it's there all the time."

Obadiah brushed a hand anxiously across his mouth and along the grey-fuzz chin.

"Huh! Reckon yer Maw's right. Wall, got to be scootin' along ta see Violet. Take care."

Obadiah slumped down the road. Gilbert, lingering, talking with the next door neighbor, Bill McNeil, enjoyed the conversation and rather regretted its quick termination.

"Not a bad lot, Obadiah," Bill, a stout, likeable bachelor, ventured.

"Right there!"

"I wish half the people in these parts had his heart. Queer? Yes. But the salt o' the earth!"

Still farther down the road Gilbert stopped in to see Alma, who had been ill for over two months.

With her very aged, widowed mother she endeavored to save the heavily mortgaged farm from the looming auctioneer's hammer. It was a square, weather-racked building. One could not guess what the building's original hue had been. Grass—long, uncut, littered with weeds, browned in the late autumn suns, climbed across and all but obliterated the path to the front door.

Gilbert smiled, observing President McKinley's full-size, beaming countenance in the front window, a poster obtained from a janitor after a long-forgotten political rally.

He found Alma in bed, sitting up, her back supported by

stacked pillows.

Russet-brown hair, thick, uncut, wrapped around the head, obliterating the ears and the natural outlines of the scalp, reminded Gilbert a little of the weed-grown yard.

"Good afternoon, Brother Chalmers. Come right in. Sit down. Excuse my laziness. Mother just went across the street, to make a call. So glad you happened along. Sit down. What do you think of the times? Wrong party in power, eh? Poor people got no chance to get ahead. Might's well die sudden as by inches. Makes me think of the Dutchman that cut the dog's tail off by inches, so it wouldn't hurt so much. Everything's slowly going to pieces—the house, the town, the nation. Well, what's to be, will be!"

Alma talked wordily and at length on politics, the tavern, the town's doings, church socials, the sinful state of the young people, the world that was full of wickedness and drunkenness. Gilbert, at infrequent intervals, slid a bit of conversation into the tumultuous torrent.

"Hill Grove ain't what it used to be. Like the old grey mare Pop used to sing about. In the mud up to its ears. Yes, siree! But—we can only do the best we can; if we've got to go down, to go down with all colors flying! As for that tavern! Of all the low-down, stinking, beastly holes—that beats 'em all! Like to burn it down, yes, siree! Lock, stock and barrell!"

When the call was over Gilbert, rather weary, just listening, his ears ringing, continued his walk to the O'Brien homestead. The walk through the woods was re-creating.

He found Mrs. O'Brien in the wide, severely plain farmhouse kitchen. After a long conversation she informed him that "her man" was out in the lot, the west lot, cutting and crating cauliflower. Yes, she would be delighted to prepare the required dish for the supper.

Gilbert circled around to the side of the house. A quarter

of a mile away he discerned the outlines of a truck, stacked cauliflower crates and a tiny figure. Out in a cold, blustery October field, Lew was running his farm—alone.

"Hello, dominee!" Lew saluted. "If ye want ta talk, help me crate these things. Pow-ful busy. Bet ye can't do it!"

Gilbert selected and squeezed seven heads into one old rickety crate.

"Got to get nine in! Here! Let me show ye!" Lew emptied the crate and filled it again. "Come on!" he challenged. With his knife Lew cut off the heads from the stout stalks, the great leaves tied together to keep off the sun and safeguard the creamy whiteness of the centers, and tossed them to Gilbert. It was all the pastor could do, though in his youth, to keep pace with the practised efforts of the man who limped and yet moved swiftly.

For two hours Gilbert made a pastoral call and lugged cauliflower heads and packed fifty crates full, nine to a crate. Then they were piled on the truck, tied with a long rope and made ready for the Providence (R. I.) market.

"Bet ye couldn't get up at three in the mornin' and larn what happens to these," Lew challenged. "I go in ev'ry mornin'—and have—for the last three months. The young feller who used to go oversleeps lately. Wife can't go in no more—she's not feelin' springy any more. Bet ye couldn't get up at three, if ye died!"

Lew O'Brien, in the late fifties, a generally quiet, industrious farmer of the non-committal type, had been hard to get acquainted with. His wife, a talkative, genial English woman, was exactly the opposite. Was this a chance to get to know Lew?

This was more than a challenge.

The fellow was lonely. That was plain to be seen. He limped on one foot—over work—trying to make the old farm

pay. He was actually urging companionship on the young pastor. But should he accept at such hours? Meet him at the rotary at three? Chilly mornings! Brrr! The truck was not a new one and did not ride like an enclosed, heated sedan.

Would it not be breaking a precedent in a rather aristocratic New England town? Suppose Wally Rutgers happened to be afoot again? Or Purdy? And yet, Lew had challenged, a frequent church goer, a yearly contributor, though not a member.

The following morning Gilbert was at the rotary at five minutes before three. Some three or four cars whizzed by in the darkness. Shortly the roaring, laboring noise of a motor advancing through the dense gloom and two drab orange headlamps heralded the approach of Lew's high-piled truck.

From out the darkness Gilbert stepped into the truck's cab and the wheezing, rocking old vehicle went tearing through the starless night along winding, nigh abandoned roads. Lew stopped the car in Scituate at a roadside diner, to warm up on doughnuts and coffee.

It was an unusual, unforgettable experience for Gilbert, this new kind of pastoral work, presenting conversation and rattling into Providence at this unearthly hour.

"Why don't you hire regular help?" Gilbert questioned.

"Can't afford to. Get a man, now and then, when I have to. But can't make enough for myself, to say nothin' about a hired man." Lew drew on the inseparable corn-cob and bent forward, alert, in the dark, shuddering cab. "Past five years I made enough to make Aunt Annie a duster. Ain't made no more. But got to keep goin'. Keep hopin' each year that the worst is over."

"You eastern farmers ought to apply for government aid," Gilbert ventured, feeling pity for this aging, embattled farmer.

"Huh, Washin'ton' don't care about the Eastern farmer.

He's a little shot. The little shot, though, has got to float all the Western caboodle!"

"But it isn't fair!" broke in the pastor. "Your problems are just as vicious as their's."

"Mebbe they are. But do we go belly-achin' around? No. We drink and yell our troubles to the wolyes! We grin and bear 'em to folks. And if we can't whistle, we just smoke to keep our spirits up. Nope! We don't dispatch delegations to Washin'ton."

"But you need help."

"Don't want none! When we got to have charity doled out in order to run our farmin' bus'ness, it's time to quit. We ain't never goin' to ask for help. We're Yanks!"

Gilbert had never before dreamt this man's proud, grim heroism. Thrilled, conquered by the deliberate, high spirit of this hard-working commoner, aloof and usually silent, the youth rebuked himself for his own grave lack of faith and courage.

Soon the two were untying the ropes that bound the high-piled crates, carrying them to their places in the warehouse, meeting other men in the cold, frost-bitten darkness at four-thirty, beneath the scattered, yellow electric bulbs.

Jokes were passed, people were twitted, business was completed and then Lew invited Gilbert to breakfast in a narrow, crowded restaurant nearby. Every type of man was there, all hard-working toilers of the cosmos, mostly foreigners. Truckmen, farmers, railroad men, peddlers with fruit carts, purchasing agents.

Flapjacks and syrup, sausages and coffee. Lew ordered for two.

Gilbert started to remove his hat.

"Don't take your lid off," he suggested quietly. "They'll know ye're a green-horn. Nobody eats here with his hat off."

For the first time in four years Gilbert got acquainted with Lew, talking, comparing notes, during the long morning ride. He learned much about Lew's early story as a Long Island farmer, later experiences in New York City, then as a Connecticut farmer.

On the way home the skies were gradually brightening, friendly bits of pink and gold put in appearance, the headlamps lost their orange lustre.

"Reckon I can keep goin' another year or two," Lew confessed. "Jack Kivella, he said t'other day, that his old man was in the lean years, too. And Gorman, the store keeper, told me t'other day that he couldn't collect half the dough he had on bills. Didn't know where he was gettin' off at. Said he couldn't furnish bread and butter for the 'hull' town.

"Young man," Lew spoke with new, deeper interest, his face still looking forward, his eyes not wandering an instant from the circuitous stretch of country road ahead. "Young man, ye got no idea what them people is up against that ye try to preach to on Sunday mornin's. Nope! Ye ain't got no idee at all!"

"I ought to have some inkling, shouldn't I, calling on them constantly, mixing with them?"

"Nope! Ye've never been hard put. Brought up in a good fam'ly, given yer schoolin'. Gone out into a payin' job, gettin' yer salary in an envelope ev'ry month. No kids. No house rent to pay. Nope! Can't know. Fellers like ye ought to go our road, have our debts and old places and empty pockets ef ye expect to preach ta us. Yep!"

"I did enjoy the trip this morning, Lew. It was good to feel the tides of humanity flowing at the market and warehouse. The friendly, genial spirit of everybody, even the coarse jests of the little Italian. I didn't mind. The thorough lack of make-beleave, sham and artifice, the great, human brotherhood

of early morning risers and hard-working people, I felt it here. The great, human interest seemed realer than in the church."

Lew was saying nothing now. He had forgotten to draw on the pipe stem with becoming regularity. It was black out again. He hadn't even noticed.

Lights, like twin, lost stars of the night that suddenly found undreamt fulfillment at dawn, were shining entrancingly from quiet, grey eyes that did not wander a hand's breadth from the brightening highway.

HILLSIDE HOUSE

Gilbert was out pastoral calling one pleasant afternoon. He had made some half a dozen calls on regular church members. It was at the seventh port of call that he met a most interesting woman, a stranger. He stopped for a brief call at the home of Mrs. John Cummings. After a few moments, Mrs. Cummings coaxed a woman into the sitting room. The stranger had evidently vanished into the kitchen when the minister entered the home.

The timid intruder looked like forty, though the pastor learned later that she had just passed thirty. Soon this short, rotund figure monopolized the conversation—after church work was mentioned.

She could not have been over five feet high and so round that she would have been an excellent roly-poly object, dressed simply, severely in green that fitted none too tastily to her over-size figure. It was not the fault of the clothing, but of the rather baffling model.

Gilbert first noticed, however, her marked English accent and mentioned the latter to her.

"You must be English," he ventured.

"No—Canadian," she returned. "I have lived here, two miles back in the country, for many years." Nevertheless, he learned, later, that she had been born in Yorkshire, England, and had spent a brief childhood there.

Gilbert asked her if she attended church.

This set her going.

"No, I don't go to the Hill Grove Church because when I attended there, the first time, another well-dressed lady edged away from me and out of the seat. I left the church right there—during the service. The ministers around here never called on me. They call up and down the road. They don't care anything about my place. Churches aren't what they used to be!

"My brother stopped attending church in another town when criticized out of the choir because he couldn't get to choir practise one night!

"A few years ago a certain pastor gave Bible Readings in his home. I told a leading lady of the church I would like to attend. Said the lady, 'Oh, Reverend So-and-So doesn't want to have maids and servant-girls there!' I was a servant then in a village family."

The talkative, energetic little woman cast a glance around the room, then paused.

"Let me see," she soliloquized. "I read a poem once. One verse went like this: A working girl in the sight of God is as high as a queen on a throne."

With frank, brave eagerness the short, rotund talker looking directly at the minister, continued.

"Churches today are run by a select few for a select few. They don't care anything about the common people!"

Her words went through Gilbert like an electric shock. He thought instantly of what was written about the Master: "And the common people heard him gladly."

Instantly he obeyed an inner voice that said: "It's high time that a minister called on you." So he inquired, "Where do you live?"

"About two miles up Green Hollow."

"Look for me some time tomorrow afternoon. Though not within the bounds of my parish, you are entitled to a pastoral call of some sort. I preach here every Sunday. If I call, will you attend church?"

"I will."

Before Gilbert left he sang a few hymns for Mrs. Cummings; a few old hymns of the church. He pumped and played the wheezy old organ and suddenly realized that the strange woman in green had joined in and was singing enthusiastically "Life is like a mountain railroad with an engineer that's brave" and "Saviour, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care."

The talkative woman, with the suggestion of wild flowers still visible on her cheeks, her teeth nicely kept and pleasingly obvious when she talked, her English accent very real and heartening, suddenly declared she had far over-stayed her visit; she must hurry up and walk some two miles and more to get her husband's supper. He would be out of the woods soon.

And she had gone.

A rather chill wind and an over-cast sky served to eliminate some of the joy from Gilbert's anticipated walk as he turned down the none-too-wide dirt road called The Green Hollow Road the next afternoon. Automobiles whirring by spun clouds of dust from the dry road; children, stringing along, shyly returned greetings. Gilbert drank deeply the exhilaration of woodland greenery and the sudden recurring pools of gray-green water that shone through the trees at frequent intervals.

He had walked considerable distance and was leaving the Green Hollow Road for a smaller side road that, one said, wound right down to the meadows, when he spied a short, rotund figure in green ahead of him on the side road. One hand held papers; the other rolled a new, wrapped automobile tire along the road.

He helloed to her.

She turned about.

"I've been to the mail and back. Tried to get back first. Had a tire in the mails for my husband's car. Had to have it tonight." They walked only a few paces more.

She well called the house "Hillside House", situated, as it was, on the slope of a thickly wooded hill, in a clearing affording a glorious, extended view of the softly-rolling Quinebaug Valley.

Gilbert first observed, however, the scraggly, immense sunflowers everywhere—these great, huge giant-faces that were far more imposing and compelling than the small, rather ramshackle dwelling.

"The house was burned down before we bought the place," she ventured. "We made over one of the wood-sheds into a house. That is why it does not conform to type. Hope we'll all have a better one some day!"

Hens ranged about the little iron-grey house, among the sunflowers and dahlias and through the woodlands. Dogs and cats appeared and disappeared. Gilbert noticed the well of water near the front door, little more than a few boards nailed together, a roller between, for a rope and a bucket.

The woman unlocked the auspicious door.

"Come in."

She entered. The pastor followed.

The parlor was small, a box-like affair of a room. Strange to say, the very room reminded the minister of its occupant, even to physical appearance—not large, rather drab and ungainly—a faded, bleached air to everything. The furniture and the many articles arranged in it were not too well fitted to the room's awkward torso.

The woman offered the pastor a short, stinky rocker, laid aside her wraps, tramped into the kitchen, stirred the fire, placed

a pot roast on the stove and busied herself about the place for a few moments.

Gilbert began noticing the many mottoes, poems, pictures on the dusty walls.

One particularly interested him. A strange wall-motto indeed.

On a gilded card was drawn in amusing outlines the figures of a plodding old donkey and his donkey-cart, on which sat a rollicking, gay old Yorkshire vagrant and his fat little white dog and a bag of meal. Beneath the sketch were these lines.

"Here's my old moke, me dawg and me. We haven't got a soul! But do we laugh? Lor' bless us, yus! Why I should say we do! We're Friends,—that matters most of all. Contented, sure, if slow. I'm sure I 'opes you'll fare no worse as on yer way yer go."

Gilbert mentioned his interest to the mistress of the house.

"Yes, it is out of the ordinary. Uncle Jim sent it to me from Yorkshire, England, where I was born and spent my early years."

"Do you know anything about the great English writers—Shakespeare, Shelley, Carlyle? You have a pleasant view here. Ever see the Stratford-on-Avon, an English landscape?"

"Many's a time. The swans on the Avon river are wonderful. The wild flowers are so pretty—white bells, pink bells, blue bells, oxslips, primrose, crocus, woodbine, the morning and evening star."

Again she tramped into the kitchen to stir the fire and feed it with wood.

Shortly she returned and little by little told the story of her life. She kept driving out a most friendly little dog called "Tiny" and shoing out adventurous hens that roamed the parlor.

She left Yorkshire for Canada and then came "to the States." Her parents were still alive, in Canada. Very wonderful and religious parents, she said.

This prematurely old and thick-set woman of thirty showed the pastor her picture when three years old in a sunbonnet-hat that would stock a millinery shop today.

"I've got it yet," she said.

"You were an attractive child," Gilbert ventured. He could have said honestly, "very sweet." But with St. Paul he had learned that though many things are lawful they are not expedient.

The child's face was particularly wistful and devout; it had an appealing beauty that Gilbert had seen on few childish faces—a distinct air of saintliness. Her face, full, round, inexpressibly sweet, might well have inspired the brush of a Sir Joshua Reynolds or the pen of a Keats or Shelley.

She moved across the room to another picture—a large one.

"I was twenty-one there," she remarked. "I wish I was like that today and as innocent as then." Nor was there any pretended piety in her confession, only a sincere, severe honesty. For a moment it seemed that she had become the little girl in the other picture, so reverent and wistful did she appear. There were no tears, no sign of levity. Her heart was in her voice.

At twenty-two she was married up country in Canada to a lumberman she met and in two years returned to her mother's home to have her first child—a boy. Not until after the birth of that child did she know that it was not legally hers.

A young man, witness at that up country wedding, hearing about the new arrival, journeyed miles to tell "Millie" that her baby was not lawfully hers. The marriage had been a mock marriage. It had been a fake ceremony before an unauthorized

justice of the peace. Her husband was a bigamist and had fled.

"Why did you come and tell me now?" she cried in anguish.

"My conscience pricked me, now that you have a child," said the unfortunate young man who had been bribed.

When the awful truth was substantiated by inquiry Millie wrote her mother a letter of farewell and started down for the wharves. As fortune would have it, her mother came in the back door almost as Millie went out the front, and the infant, crying, attracted the mother into Millie's bedroom. There the frantic mother read the suicide note, raced to the shore and caught hold of Millie's coat before she could plunge into the Bay of Fundy.

"You can't get out of your troubles this way," the mother declared. "Moreover, you have a child to live for."

Two years later, "in the States", another woodsman wooed and won her. Again it was only to get out of the frying pan into the fire. Hard liquor and an ungovernable temper again took its toll out of her youth.

One morning her husband was unusually kind to her, kissed her goodbye and suggested he might never see her again. Three hours later she received word that he had been injured sawing wood and had been rushed eight miles to the nearest hospital.

Millie left her boy with a neighbor and walked two miles to the office of the doctor who had taken her husband to the hospital.

"Where is he?" she inquired of the physician.

"In the Memorial Hospital."

"Is he bad off?"

"He'll pull through all right. You don't need to worry."

"I'm going to him."

"There's no need of it."

"I'm going."

Two miles up the road the doctor passed the walking Millie in his car as she hiked on to the hospital. An hour later she passed the doctor. She was almost to the hospital. He had been to the hospital and was returning.

Millie took her husband home with her two days later—minus two fingers, to nurse him at home and save expenses.

A week later, while she laced up his heavy lumberman's boots, he drew up his two huge feet and drove them, full force, into the stomach of the patient, pleading wife. Then he stormed angrily out of the house and into the woods for two solid weeks.

"I lost my four month's old baby and carried the marks of those two feet for months. I thought I would die that weekend. No one called. Only God knows what I went through! Doctor said, a year later, that I would never have another child. Maybe it's just as well. A drunkard's home is no place for one. I'd always hoped, though, to have a little sister for little brother."

There was no atmosphere of a morbid confession in all this; nor was there the least suggestion of pride, as though she bragged her strenuous life and fortitude.

Suddenly she excused herself and stood.

"You must let me get you a lunch," she suggested.

Two cups of tea and two plates of doughnuts. The doughnuts were unbelievably fine, made with two cups of mashed potatoes instead of two eggs.

It was a plain, simple lunch, the first cup of tea supplanted by a second. Then ginger cookies were brought in to top off with.

While finishing the lunch Gilbert noticed another motto on the wall entitled—Happiness.

He read it aloud.

There's a lot more light than shadow,
There's a lot more sun than rain,
There's a lot more good than evil
And lots more joy than pain.
There are valleys, there are hilltops,
Grim set-backs and success;
Though sorrow is a-plenty
There's still more happiness.

"I always liked that one," she said. "I've tried to keep smiling through the years. Pretty hard sometimes.

"Last winter no one visited the house all winter long. My husband was in the woods all the week, home only on Sundays. I don't know what I'd have done without Charlie, that's my boy. He's to his father's sister's place this week. I often think of giving up; but I keep going for Charlie's sake. Maybe I'll meet a man yet who'll give me a break."

Again she left for the kitchen. This time she placed the roast in the oven and filled the great tea-kettle on the stove with fresh water drawn from the well.

About this prematurely old woman of thirty there was something tremendously human, tremendously stoical, tremendously good.

"I've done all I could to make the best of a bad bargain," she owned. "Once my husband kept sober for a year and I began to have hopes. But a strange man and woman came to town and they got him drinking again. I haven't given up hoping, though. Sometimes I pray."

Again and again she eulogized her mother. What would she have done without her mother? Her mother saved her from suicide and even now would not consent to her keeping house for so brutal and sometimes so morally unfaithful a husband.

Once more the pastor's eyes wandered over to the pictures—the dream-faced child with the long curls in the old English daguerrotype and the short, round figure in white, the girl of twenty-one, seemingly then a woman of thirty or more. Once more he looked into the tired but flashing eyes, the creased but still wistful face of the Yorkshire Lass before him, a faint scattering of scarlet petals about her cheeks.

"I have been true to my marriage vows," she said. "Even to the first man I thought I married. But I wish I could be again like I was when I was twenty-one. It must be wonderful to be married to a sober man who loves a woman, takes her places and makes of her."

Gilbert began to think of the poetry of experience, the grandeur of common humanity, and to feel a certain unnatural softness about his eyes. He remarked that he must be going. It was quite a walk back to the village.

"Come, see my live stock first!" she urged, then hurried out doors, scattered mash and sunflower seeds on the ground and called the hens and chickens. They rushed up from below, down from above and over from across, clucking, cackling, scolding.

"Glad to have met you," the pastor confessed.

"I'll be out to church Sunday," she promised. "Rain or shine."

As Gilbert turned back into the road he heard her humming something—something gay, racy, even boisterous. He stole a glance back. She was carrying a pail to the well. In another moment he heard the creaking of the roller as the bucket plunged downward to the water.

Maples and white birches soon shut out the sight of Hill-side House, the giant sunflowers, the clucking hens, the lonely but now gayly whistling Millie. He heard her whistling as he joined again Green Hollow Road.

Behind the trees and brush, in a little enclosure overlooking the meadows, she tramped indoors not heavily, not lightly—but whistling.

Gilbert was sorry for only one thing.

He had requested sugar in his tea. Rather, he simply asked if she had sugared his tea. His people generally took their tea without sugar. Gilbert preferred it.

Millie's face flushed.

She stammered: "I—I haven't got a mite in the house. I told the store-keeper to send me up a couple of pounds. He hasn't arrived yet. I'm terribly sorry—I—but—"

Gilbert made all manner of apologies. The cream was exceptionally sweet and he shouldn't have spoken until he had tasted the tea. He asked for a second cup, to assure her of the excellence of the drink.

As he journeyed homeward on the winding, dirt road and automobiles whirled by, throwing up their spirals of dust, he recalled a jogging donkey and a quaint old donkey-cart, a Yorkshire jolly-good-fellow and his dog and one line beneath the picture—

"We're Friends,—that matters most of all."

BOOK TWO:

SWIFT CRUSHED TO EARTH

S A C R A M E N T

Gilbert had settled down for a comfortable February night indoors.

Both stoves, kitchen and parlor, were flooding the house with delightful warmth. The table-model radio was playing softly. He was reading a new book on the subject of social ethics, a particularly engaging subject, a plate of popcorn at his elbow on the parlor table. The floor lamp shed a soft rose-lustre over the friendly little room.

Gilbert listened to the wind on rampage outside, whistling down the chimney, smashing snow hard up against the frosted parlor windows, shaking the house, rattling panes of glass upstairs. How thankful he was for shelter and dry cord-wood on a night like this!

Evelyn was stitching upstairs in the narrow sewing room. How musical the noise of the machine seemed to be tonight! It blended softly with the radio-violins, almost bequeathing a sonorous overtone to the orchestral background.

"What a night at sea!" he was thinking, recalling ocean trips from Boston to Yarmouth, years ago, when his mother took him to Nova Scotia summers, to visit an aunt there.

A few minutes earlier he had stared through one unfrosted corner of one parlor window at the fiercely snowing night, the white-piled roads, the huge, whirling mounds, the tops whirled into spray by the wind and driven in long, scattered lines

across field and road.

Thankfully he had settled back into the cushioned rocker by the floor lamp, the table and radio at his other elbow.

A sudden, deliberate scuffling, stomping noise on the front porch, a rap on the door, an instantaneous opening, a moment's further stomping in the hallway, the swift entrance of Selma into the parlor, Gilbert rising to his feet.

"Selma!" he exclaimed, staring at the snow-mantled figure in coon-cap (Jack's Christmas gift), overcoat and overshoes, the face purpled by the storm, the eyes so intense they pierced his flesh. Swiftly, trembling, she commanded—

"Quick, Mr. Chalmers! My mother is dying! Quick! She wants you!"

There was no need to question the girl's sincerity and passionate compulsion. Swiftly forgetting his thoughts, the fire, the music, he swept into cap and mackinaw and overshoes and followed Selma into the wild February night.

"Here, let me go ahead!" he bade her. "I'll break the path!" he cried, trying to out-voice the screaming wind.

"It's already broken," she reminded him. "See my foot-steps?" She gesticulated across the snow-mounded lawn to the road, recently cleared by a state snowplough, already fast filling.

"What happened?"

"Don't know. Mother seemed to be all right all day. After supper she took dreadful sick. Jack went for the doctor. Said, a few minutes ago, she was dying, couldn't pull through." Selma paused, lapsed into silence.

"Did she ask for me?"

Selma, waiting briefly, ventured unsteady conversation again.

"Kept calling—minister—minister. Doctor sent me after you. Didn't dare to send Jack. He was chilled to the bone,

getting through to the doctor. Father isn't well. I told him I'd go."

"What do you think she wants me for? She never attended church."

Gilbert wrapped the mackinaw's collar more closely about his neck. The icy wind, roaring across one open field, flung its bitter-cold lances into his face, all but shutting off his breath.

"I'll bet it is twenty below tonight!" he exclaimed, diflecting his own conversation. "What a night for this kind of a call. Doctors and preachers—they're in the same fix tonight. My, what a wind! Look! Ahead! A car! Blocked! Caught in that drift. It will never get free tonight. Better leave the car and go back to Sam Jones' place for the night."

Gilbert and Selma approached the car, headlights bravely but with futility venturing their infinitesimal radiances into the howling, encroaching dark. Gilbert yelled through the side window.

"Can't get out tonight, brother!"

Two dark shadows loomed inside, a radio playing. A man's voice answered. The window was rolled open a little and instantly closed.

"Where's the plough? Isn't this a state road?"

"Sure. But wouldn't be surprised if the plough'd get snowed up tonight. Did last week. Better go back to the last house you just passed."

A fierce, bitter blast of wind drenched the speaker, Selma, and shook the car.

"Okay. Wait."

A man and woman emerged from the sedan. The man began flumbling with the keys.

"Nobody can run off with it tonight, Frank. Don't be silly!" A woman's irritated voice.

Four figures now bent laboriously into the storm. At the

Jones' place the two strangers took grateful leave of and blessed their kind friends.

"What does your mother want me for? She doesn't know much English. Of course she couldn't get a Finnish pastor. The nearest is in Norwich. But I can't understand her very well. You'll have to be an interpreter."

"I think not. Mother just wants you, I guess, for the same reason everybody else likes to have you around." Her words, warm and soulfully flowing, were hauntingly lovely, making beautiful conquest of and temporarily vanquishing the cold, hateful night.

"How's that?"

"Well, we all feel better, braver, truer, when you are around. Jack feels that way. I know. And so do I. Only more so!" Gilbert felt Selma fling an arm around his and nestle close to it, hugging his arm as the two of them struggled along the wild, whited road, through the stinging whips of the unmerciful, snow-ridden wind.

"Why is that?" he inquired, sheltering his face from another Arctic blast that made a snow man out of him.

"Because I'm a girl."

Her voice, strong, brave, faltered for an instant, then he heard it again. "Because I'm a girl and so I can love you more."

Was it this dreadful night, a witch-crazed night of a thousand deadly furies that had precipitated this not wholly unexpected crisis? Gilbert was tremendously conscious of the pressure on his mackinaw sleeve, the whole-hearted, resolute pressure that said in inarticulate but recognizable speech: "This is what I love. What I have always desired."

In this howling, frightening holocaust of whited madness she could express herself unafraid, without fear of preying eyes, interruption or censure.

"They all love you—but not like I do. I could do anything for you. I could—even—die—for you."

The pressure on his arm suddenly became fierce, terrible, absolute as the enraged, unconquerable night. He felt her mind, heart, soul, body, everything laying hold of him, claiming him, crying for him, demanding him. For the moment a wild, crazy ecstasy, exotic as this storm on rampage, laid desolate his inward strength even as the wind-driven snow, knee-high in spots, was slowly vanquishing his physical power.

A mad, almost superhuman impulse seized him to forget the night, scorn it, laugh it away, stop, take Selma in his arms, tell her a what a silly, impossible little fool she was but what an appreciative, darling little fool, even so! This honest, pulsing wanting of him; this sincere, utter craving of him, his love, soul, mind and strength. Only a strong, well-trained will kept him sane, controlled in that moment, as everything in his blood cried out to recognize her claim, reciprocate confession, admit love and begin to build love's dream in dead earnest.

But the face of a dying woman wouldn't let him do it; the swift-flashing vision of Evelyn in the sewing room at home, the four pillars that symbolized grace and divinity, looming upward on a white, imposing edifice that he called—God's.

"I am glad you love me. But you must remember, Selma, as much as I care for you—for the sweet, dear girl you have been—that I am married and a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Selma did not reply, nor did the soulful, heavy pressure on his left arm relax. And—how glad he was that this pretty, whole-souled girl was here with him, at his side, making grim, steady conquest of the storm for the sake of a dying woman!

The struggle through the drifts was doubly difficult after abandoning the partly ploughed state road. When these two

toilers of the white-laden night reached the Kivella kitchen their strength was spent.

But the delicious warmth of the fire-bright, lamp-lit kitchen quickly restored them, and a steaming cup of strong coffee. Gilbert was, in another moment, led by the father into the bedroom.

A white, drawn face, hair, dishevelled, eyes watery and bereft of their compelling bright lights, turned toward the newcomer.

"Minister! Minister!"

Two grey-gnarled hands were upraised, the fingers twitching violently, greed, hunger, desperation in the face, the eyes, the fingers, the voice.

"Minister! Sacrament! Sacrament!"

Over and over, these two, intensely spoken words. Again a passion, a prayer undefeatable as the storm.

"Any grape juice?" Gilbert asked Selma, who softly slid into the room, to the other side of the bed.

"No."

"Any wine?"

"Just cherry."

"Get some."

"How much?"

"Only two or three spoonfuls in a glass. And a bit of bread."

"Finnish bread do?"

"Anything. Quick."

Gilbert forced the bread into the mouth, prying apart the lips that were quieting. Next he lifted the head from the pillow and emptied the small measure of wine down the throat. Then he bent over and offered a short, tender prayer, holding one grey, gaunt hand in his two, cupped hands. While he prayed tears glistened in Selma's eyes. The father, choking, moved

from the room. The doctor continued to mix something in a glass in the opposite corner of the room.

"Thank—thank—"

The hand sank deeper into the pillows, the eyelids closed. Selma made an outcry. The doctor hastened to the bed, bent his head to the heart of the woman. Next he tried the pulse, rubbed the patient's forehead.

"She is not dead," he remarked. "Another sinking spell. Get some more hot water. Ammonial" He whirled to Selma. Gilbert moved back to the kitchen, to warm himself by the fire.

Jack brought him a heavy pair of stockings.

"Dry ones. Exchange. Get feet warm."

"Never mind. Stick right in oven!" the father jerked. "Who care? Thaw out!"

"Better stay here tonight," Jack suggested. "Doubt if you could get back tonight."

"Maybe I will."

Selma prepared a midnight lunch for all. The doctor was remaining, too. The mother might be spared yet.

"What was the real trouble?" Gilbert queried.

"Complications. Heart trouble. Acute indigestion."

"But I didn't think Mrs. Kivella had either trouble."

"Never can tell what people have hanging over them. Remember the old story about the man and the sword dangling over his head?"

"But isn't this unusual?"

"Most unusual."

"Will she get well?"

"I think so. If she lasts two hours more I believe we can pull her through. A powerful constitution."

"Something she ate?"

"No, I think not. I don't think so."

Doctor Smith tramped heavily back into the bedroom. He

was not a small man.

Gilbert was puzzled.

He had never before known the physician to be so vague. And Jack seemed crest-fallen, the father crest-fallen. A stiff, hard atmosphere, of which he was conscious, prevailed. Secretly he asked himself many annoying questions. Only Selma appeared to be herself, radiantly, gloriously herself.

Like a gay little goddess she flitted about her rooms, doing her work, following the doctor, exchanging smiling, adoring glances with the friendly, congenial pastor getting warmed by the huge kitchen stove that was now flinging out the heat of a furnace.

Two hours later Doctor Smith announced the wonderful word—"better".

Selma lit a candle and led Gilbert upstairs to a small, cramped, crude bedroom.

"This is your room for tonight. It isn't much; but it's the best I can offer. I'm in the next room. Hope you rest well. I've been made very happy tonight, though I was so afraid. I've been happier than you'll ever know. Good-night. Good-night." Selma set the candle on the plain wooden table, stepped to the door, softly closed it, and just before it quite closed she finished the phrase—"Dear."

EYES TO SEE

Snow banks crumbled in Hill Grove. Spring, a madcap girl, escaping a far, lost realm, whirled sudden, green, breath-taking loveliness through the town and scattered its wild, sweet youth across the fields, reckless and everywhere! Suns rose earlier in the mornings and retired later, enjoying a longer day. Summer spread its lavish yields on slope and meadow and river-side and full, perfect beauty once more made fond invasions of a few wistful human hearts.

Gilbert, scanning from his study window the ripe, rich tints of hay fields, decided on an afternoon of creative ecstasy.

After dinner he gathered his materials again and sallied down the road.

His shirt, sleeves off above the elbows, open at the throat, gave an impression of pleasant casualness. In light grey trousers, an old pair of sneakers for comfort, he hardly seemed to be the conventional type of stiff, formal country parson. With radiant face, sun-bright eyes and a genial swagger he swung down the road, exchanging friendly greetings with all he passed; men, women, children, old timers, tourists, vagrants.

In front of the small town garage Gilbert spied a group of men lounging in the shade, Obadiah sitting, tilting back against a stone wall on a piano stool minus its back. Others were straddling boxes and cord-wood ends and planks. One man sprawled on the wall.

Alma, amply bundled, came tramping imperiously up the road, with long, firm steps, swinging along with determination and vigor, market basket in hand, her russet-brown hair waving every-which-way in the strident summer breeze.

"Hello Alma!" the boys shouted, all of them over forty.

"Terrible hot day!" Alma retorted, coming to a dead stop, mopping her face with a large handkerchief that reminded one of a red and white bandana. "Makes me think we all got lost in the lower regions!"

"Might think ye bin drinkin', talkin' like that!" Obadiah ventured, grinning, hands clasped behind him, hard up against the wall, driving a mouthful of brown wetness into the ground, widening its circle. That was enough to rouse Alma.

"Me—drinking? I'd go to hell first! It's a terrible thing to have that tavern in town, sending the young ones to crime! A woman got soused in there last week, yes siree! And a woman went in last night to get her crazy, keeled-over husband out. She give it to him with a broom-stick, too, when she got him home!"

"Oh, taverns is all right in their place, Alma," a wizened old chap comforted.

"Lots go in," Obadiah added. "Makes somebody bus'ness."

"Business?" yelled Alma, her face purpling, her neck stuck out, face arched up and above it, as near the circle of critics as she could get it without moving her feet. "Business? It's the devil's business! All right in its place, eh? It's place is the hot place!"

Alma, whisking a desolating look at the men, lunged with long, decisive legs up the road, not once turning back.

"There, Obadiah, reckon that will larn ye ta mind yer own bee's wax," an old man sallied.

"Huh! She ain't a hard one ta handle. Now take Violet,

she—" Obadiah spat his whole cud, that instant, into the dirt. "But s'long, boys, got ta make me daily trip. See ya all when I come 'long back."

Gilbert, passing, paused long enough to enjoy the spontaneous excitement, then hastened jovially on his way.

He finally selected a strategic position in Burton's pasture, overlooking the Cummings' hay field.

Beneath a large black walnut tree, in the dense, cool shade Gilbert made himself comfortable. A smooth rock on the grassy slope provided a better seat than his folding chair of japanned tin. He dug the easel-spikes into the soft turf and commenced work on his painting of a hay field. He decided to paint the horse, mowing machine and all, as Jim Cummings mowed back and forth across the field. The clattering noise of the striking knife-blade drowned out the voices of thrush and wren.

Looking up from his intensive labor to rest his eyes, scanning the farther hills critically, Gilbert noticed a familiar figure in white waving to him from the road. The heap of gold topping the head, the way the girl waved her hand, told him her name. Selma. Soon he noticed her threading her way through the hay field.

"What are you doing now? Painting a hay field?"

"Trying to."

"Finding it hard?"

"Am I? Look! I've hardly got anything done. I guess I've met my match. It's almost impossible to get the general color of that field, the total effect. Daisies, buttercups, clover and thousands of little blooms are in that field. Even the grass is deeper yellow and deeper green in places, like shadows in moving water on a beach."

"I shouldn't think a hay field would be as difficult to paint as running water, like at Horse-Fly."

"Well it is! You can't tell what is impossible, until you make an attempt."

"But I don't think anything is impossible to you."

"No?"

"No."

"Well, many things are. That hay field, for instance."

"Looks pretty natural to me," Selma ventured, standing off, slanting her head, half shutting the lids of her eyes, looking at his sketch through them, as Gilbert had suggested.

"That's because you haven't got those little bullet-eyes opened yet. Takes time, you know."

"Suppose I ever will?"

Wistfully, hungrily she looked down upon him, standing by his shoulder, a kind of prayer in her eyes.

"Never can tell. I sincerely hope so."

"What time of day do you think is loveliest?" she suddenly interposed. "Morning, noon or night?"

"I prefer twilight. The handsomest shades of all God blends at twilight. That's when the Supreme Artist superbly mixes His colors. Twilight sheen on water or grass is utterly baffling and elusive.

"Artists try—artists fail. But the twilight is alive with millions of sparklets, pearls, rubies, opals. Twilight is a prodigal daughter, flinging beauty, glamour, magnificence away—in wanton, careless, beautiful mood. Maybe you will understand me some day and really get to see beauty."

"You think I don't see beauty now?" She wove a golden thread of hair back into the sun-silken ball, with artful care.

"I hardly think so. Maybe you will—some day—if you try real hard to look for it."

"Think so?" Expectancy and adventure tremored in her eyes and face. She smiled entrancingly into his uplifted face.

"Yes, I do."

While Gilbert worked he began to feel that Selma was peculiarly quiet and sombre. She seated herself on another smooth surface of rock, a short distance away, and watched him moodily.

Soon he took courage.

"Something's brimming over inside, Selma. Let it spill. What is it?"

"What is what?"

"What is bothering you?"

"Nothing!"

"Yes, there is. I know it. Your very manner proves it. Come on over and tell me about everything. You can trust me. You know that."

Slowly the girl approached. An unexpected, great seriousness drew the lines of the face into an unnatural and unpleasant curvature. Reaching Gilbert she burst into violent, staggering sorrow. She hastily lifted her hands to her face and sobbed convulsively, standing, eyes hidden, attempting neither to come nearer or run away. Soon the flood of emotion passed.

"It's things at home," she blurted out. "Father, mother, Jack! I don't know what we're coming to. Everything's wrong! The house, the crops, the hens, the times, the country, everything! Everything's against us! We'll all starve to death or be tramps or something!" Again she plunged her face into protecting, extending fingers.

Gilbert laid aside palette and brushes and gently urged the girl to be seated, then seated himself beside her.

"Easier now, Selma. Slower. Just what is the trouble?"

"Father's told Jack to get out this fall."

"Why, what has Jack done?"

"Nothing!"

"And he has been driven from the house for doing nothing?"

Selma, that hardly makes sense."

"I know it doesn't. But Jan's old enough now to do Jack's work. Father-almost lost the old place lately. Taxes. So father told Jack to get out and shift for himself, so father can maintain the home. And Jack hasn't a place to go!"

"He can probably find work somewhere," Gilbert consoled. "He's strong, young, resolute."

"But suppose he can't? What'll happen to him? He will freeze this winter along the roads, go hungry. That's really why mother tried to kill herself last winter. She knew it was all coming."

"Tried to commit suicide?" Gilbert wheeled upon her, at once, the confused girl realizing her mistake, saying more than she planned, vainly trying to hide her confusion.

"Your mother took poison that night?"

Selma hung her head, nodded assent, afraid to venture oral conversation.

"I'm so sorry. I had a curious feeling that all wasn't well that night. But why all the fear and horror? Hundreds of boys like Jack have had to take to the roads to save homes and little, growing brothers and sisters.

"Our county jails are filled every winter, emptied every summer. That ought to tell the actual story. Thousands like Jack on the roads, overnight guests and week-end guests, shall I say, at the county jails. But they live and manage to get along, Selma, and—"

"By going to jail?" Selma fairly shouted. "Oh, Mr. Chalmers, do you think Jack will become a jail-bird?" Her head trembled with suspense and horror, the perspiration rolling off the forehead, lips, chin; the eyes phantom-eyes, filled with twin spectres of fear. "My brother—a jailbird?"

"Most certainly not," Gilbert said, quieting her, rubbing one wrist with a hand. "I was only explaining, trying to show

that others in the same predicament were not necessarily committed to winding sheets of snow, did not freeze, did not die."

After a little Selma was consoled and a fragmentary conversation again dealt with the subject of seeing beauty.

"Lato bother you these days?" Gilbert asked.

"Nope. Jack gave him a good talking to a while ago. Said if he hurt me he'd be killed. Lato's going out now with a Finnish girl from Moosup. Saw her at the Pond with him a week ago. Not much to brag about. His own type."

Soon Gilbert watched the retreating, vanishing bit of white cloth in the hay field, gradually dwindling toward the road, merging with the row of maples.

Selma, after supper, remembering an artist's comment, one that had thrilled her, finished drying the dishes with alacrity and sped across the pastures and down the wood-lot lane to Horse-Fly.

"Twilight is the most beautiful hour of all," she said to herself, over and over again.

Could she get those little bullet-eyes of hers opened? Why not? She saw romance and stirring things in a clothesline. Perhaps she could learn to see great, thrilling things in twilight radiances thrust upon green banks and grey-green water, if she tried real hard. Why not? What would happen to her when she learned to see beauty? How would she feel?

Excited, almost in an exotic mood, she scurried to the tiny, rock-strewn beach with its modest handfuls of sand, the carmine and gold touches of the sunset haloing everything everywhere and kindling smokeless fires among the beech trees, setting even the swift moving waters ablaze.

Beauty. What was it? Where was it? Would it rise up from the grey little stones, from that large lavender one she had posed once on for an artist's brush?

Would it step out of the deep, dark shadows of the wood-

land like a beautiful wood-nymph? Would it possess a voice, a face, and blonde of white-gold hair? Did beauty show herself or itself at twilight near running water? Then she would wait and have a look at it. It must be a glorious thing! The muse Gilbert loved to talk so much about! And beauty, was that not just another name for the muse?

Selma stood on the little beach, sat on a moss-grown bank, searched the little stream, the darkening, over-hanging boughs, the wind-rocked reeds, the tiny bits of flowers. Her small, intense eyes missed nothing. She watched while the night crept down upon Horse-Fly and star-tapers spilled silver light along the dark, over-arching limbs of white birches and danced down among the ferns and waltzed down stream with the purling waters.

Beauty.

Had it decided not to come that night to Horse-Fly? Did it ever come to such a common, familiar spot? She had held no tryst with beauty. Gilbert had fooled her, had lied to her.

These Americans, they were always making her aware of her foreign, humble origins. Her people were Finns. How could they see beauty in an American Paradise? Gilbert must be laughing at her now! No, he couldn't! He didn't know that she had come here. He would never know!

The lavender boulder paled into the starlight; the sun-haloed girl posed on it no longer. The night engulfed the boulder. And beauty—if there was any such thing—had passed by her in the night—and she could not see it!

Selma, biting her lips, hateful, angry to think of her gullible, empty, fool heart, cried out: "I don't believe!" and ran, stumbled, fell down, got up and pitched homeward again through the sweet summer dusk filled with the myriad fragrances of new mown hay, bitter in heart—if ever a girl was bitter.

REPERCUSSION

Evelyn dreaded phone calls from Mrs. Rutgers, the pointed suggestion that she call in when going by. Every time this happened Evelyn knew that she was going to be advised and criticized about something; either that or Gilbert had made another parish mistake. Now what was it?

"Why, of course, most certainly, Mrs. Rutgers, I'll be happy to run in." It was a lie, but Mrs. Rutgers expected her to say it, so why not? And just think of all the little white lies people send up as smoke-screens on the home front to hide their hurt feelings; what was one, more or less?

Two days later Evelyn made it her business to be just passing by the Rutgers homestead, to be calling in that locality. Her apprehensions were not unfounded.

There was much conversation about the unseasonal weather, the political upheavals in Washington, the hard times, the closed textile mills in the county, the steady growth of the labor unions, the demise of all the true old aristocrats and the remarkable birth of foreigners in adjoining towns. Evelyn broke into the preamble with an occasional "Yes" or "No" and again interpolated an occasional white lie because she didn't know anything else to do and then, again, Mrs. Rutgers expected it and her husband, after all, was treasurer of the church.

Very adroitly the flushed face and precise lips got around to the subject of the afternoon. She was quite a while

maneuvering her big guns into position, but she finally made the grade. The real attack began with: "Your husband does a great deal of calling these days, I hear."

"Yes, he does call a great deal. I have heard him say that he was told in the seminary to study book-plates in the morning and door-plates in the afternoon."

Mrs. Rutgers was a mite driven back by this sudden reference to the seminary, because she did worship anything that had seminary flavor. But she withdrew only for a moment. Again she returned to the attack.

"But the pastor calls—well—indiscriminately." She struggled as though it was hard to wheel the last word into action.

"I just don't follow you, Mrs. Rutgers."

"Well, to be more explicit and to do my bounden duty, I must say that I have heard certain ones in the parish complain because your husband has been calling at the Laramee place."

"The Laramee place? I really don't know."

"Why, you must. The whole town's talking about it. He had supper—alone—with that Millie Laramee." Evelyn recalled the word—Millie.

"Oh, you mean, down on the Green Hollow Road, the lumberman's place?"

"Indeed I do. Then it is true that the pastor has been there—and had supper there—alone?"

"He called there one afternoon—a few weeks ago."

"There! There! I knew there was a reason why that woman has been coming to church. Our former pastor didn't encourage such low-born people to attend Hill Grove church. So I have made a few inquiries. And I must say, Mrs. Chalmers, that I have been disappointed in the pastor."

"For what?" Evelyn's face broke into flame. "For what?" Her words caught fire, too. "Isn't that his business, to get those

people to church?"

"Not such a hussy as that woman! Why, do you think we want to fill the House of God with all the riff-raff! Preposterous!" Mrs. Rutgers now rocked back in the old rocker in order to give rhyme to the aid of reason. "If you want to get those people I suppose you can fill the House of God full to overflowing, if you don't care who you invite!"

Evelyn's nervous fingers snapped and unsnapped her pocketbook, possibly a half dozen times before she lunged fiercely to the counter-attack. She bent forward; her agile body arched to the attack; so taut were her two feet that they arched up off the heels in poise with her poised body.

"Well, Christ filled His Church with those people! He had a place in His Kingdom for the riff-raff!"

"Are you crazy? To say such things about our Blessed Lord! To think that he hob-nobbed with such people as Millie Laramée. The saints preserve us! And you, a minister's wife, to be so ignorant and untaught!"

Evelyn's feet were now hard on the floor; she lunged to her feet and stood at attention, every muscle set for flight.

"Me ignorant? You're the one who doesn't know the Bible! You don't know that the Lord's best friend was a prostitute!" Evelyn drove out the words like fire. They crackled, singed, burned. Mrs. Rutgers's face became the answering conflagration.

"Here, you fool, you can't say those words in my house!" Mrs. Rutgers was also on her feet. "Go on, get out of here!"

"Mrs. Rutgers, I know enough about New Testament Greek to know that when the Bible calls our Lord the friend of publicans and sinners—the word—sinners—in the Greek means harlot or prostitute. And what was Mary of Magdala? Didn't Christ appear to her in the garden? And weren't the fishermen riff-raff?"

"I don't believe it, Mrs. Chalmers, and furthermore, I won't hear such profane language in my house. You will please leave, at once! And don't come back until you can be—a lady!"

"This is just what's the matter with your churches, you're getting so high and holy that you are better than Jesus Christ. You don't take him seriously any more. You have built up a certain self-righteous culture and you brand it Christianity. And it isn't any more like Christianity than the man in the moon!"

"Are you going or not?" Mrs. Rutgers appeared to be near hysteria.

"Yes, I am! But if you think Christ wouldn't be a friend to poor Millie Laramée you need another dip! It's your kind, dried-up, hard, embittered, critical, that has ruined the churches for the common people! I don't wonder people don't come to church. Do you think I'd go if I didn't have to, as the minister's wife? I've seen so darned much hypocrisy by you and your kind that I wonder anybody goes to your church at all. A Christian Church? Don't make me laugh! The House of God? It's the House of Rutgers, McBride and Co. A Christian Church! What a joke!"

Evelyn had reached the edge of the parlor; she whirled open the front door and shut it. As she sped along the front walk to the road she passed Mr. Rutgers, whose droopy form straightened to attention as he witnessed the embattled departure.

As she hastened back to the manse—fast as she could go—she recalled her husband's story about Millie and the sunflowered yard, the cackling hens, the humble dwelling and a motto, the last line all she could remember—

"We're Friends,—that matters most of all."

ANNUAL MEETING

Gilbert had no reason to expect that the fifth annual church meeting in October would be different than all other annual meetings as, with Evelyn, he left the manse to the darkness and to the night.

One trifling incident along the way, between the manse and the church, aroused apprehension.

Alma was leaving Mrs. Eller. Hurrying along the road Gilbert and Evelyn overheard a snatch of conversation.

Beneath the yellow bulb on Mrs. Ellers' front porch Alma's buxom figure loomed.

"Yes, I'm goin' to church meetin' tonight. Big goin's on in the church tonight. So I heard. Ought to go along!"

"No thanks, Alma. The fireside's the place a night like this."

"Nope, don't think so! Not when them church elders gets on their uppers!"

"Drop in on the way back and tell me all about it."

"Mebbe I will—"

Gilbert and Evelyn were well on their way. Alma's boisterous voice was unusually piercing in the windy fall night.

"Suppose she knows anything, any advance information?" Evelyn inquired. "Alma hasn't been to a church meeting for years."

"Don't know. Alma gets wind of pretty nearly everything.

Don't like the look of this. And who is that ahead? Isn't that the whole Rutgers family in the carriage?"

"Sure is! And they've got Purdy with them, and Purdy's boy and girl. They never attend annual meetings. Something's up!" Evelyn decided.

The annual meeting was held in the small, narrow white chapel nestling along side of the church. A small, movable desk, with a little pulpit-top, served as sanctuary. A small golden-oak organ provided music. Long, hard benches provided seating capacity. Electric lights offered illumination.

The meeting tonight was three times its normal size, agog with strange faces and wriggling children, ten years to fourteen. Voices and greetings were unceremoniously intermingled; huddled groups were in the four corners of the plain, simple room and in the aisle.

Deacon Swartwood, a thick-set man, unsteady on his legs, who had succumbed to a shock two years earlier, a man with thick skin like tanned leather and distinctly fat, called the meeting to order and hit the pulpit-top with a tack-hammer rummaged from the chapel-kitchen.

"Order! Order!" he commanded in his general easy, condescending manner. This was the man, who four years earlier, on extending the call of the Hill Grove Church to the pastor had said: "We hope you will come to us and stay always." Gilbert's father, hearing of this later, had remarked: "Watch that kind, son. Too gushy. Inclined to be fickle. I know their breed."

Deacon Swartwood had not deserved this word of caution. He had invited the young minister and his wife to his elegant home on numerous occasions. Enjoyable evenings had been spent together.

Now Deacon Swartwood was addressing the pastor.

"Brother Chalmers, will you kindly open the business

session with a prayer? Invoke the Lords blessing on all that shall be said and done here tonight."

Pleased to honor such a vital, sincere request, Gilbert rose to his feet. His hands clutched the top of the bench directly in front, his eyes closed, his head was bowed.

"Let—us—all—pray."

Benches creaked, the floor shivered, the congregation turned all thoughts toward God.

"Oh God, Our Heavenly Father, we invoke Thy blessing on all that shall be done here tonight. Thou hast said—If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of Thee and Thou wilt reward him liberally. May Thy will be done here tonight, in us, as it is done in Heaven. Grant us the presence of the Spirit of Truth for all our proceedings, a fair mind, an honest heart, and an eye single to Thy glory. And help us, O God, to do everything in the spirit of love, which is the teaching of Thy Word. And may we know that Thy will is always right and good."

"Amen! Amen!" responded deacons and elders, Wally Rutger's voice distinctly audible. Purdy's high-pitched tones were also distinguishable.

"May we always realize that we are Christians and that brotherhood is our distinctive creed and spirit. Anything that is alien to Christian Brotherhood, remove it from our midst, that our service may be acceptable in Thy sight."

"Amen!" snapped Alma's precise, piercing voice. One other voice, Nan Thurston's, responded.

The prayer was finished, a few correlated matters of business were attended to, committee reports were given. Selma quietly entered the chapel and slid into the seat with the pastor and his wife, next to Nan Thurston.

"Now we will proceed to the main matter of importance of the evening, the question of the pastor. Is it the desire of

the parish to continue his services here as pastor? The ushers will distribute blank ballots. All who wish to continue his services write just the one word—yes—on the slips of paper. All who think that a change would be advisable—for the good of the parish—if such be here—let such write just the one word—no—on the slip of paper."

A bomb exploding in the room could not have startled a portion of the auditors to better effect.

Selma rose to her feet at once.

"But, Mr. Chairman," she objected, "we were informed that this meeting would not vote on this question."

"When were you so informed?"

"Jack was so informed last week."

"By who?"

"Sam Rutgers."

"That's a lie!"

Young Rutgers, face flushed, leaped to his feet, three benches ahead, and whirled defiantly about.

"That's what I heard!" Alma exploded, seated, needing no chairman or audience when she determined to speak. "It's all over town that this would happen—tell the pastor's friends to stay home—get all his enemies out!"

"I resent that implication, Alma!" Mrs. Rutgers, her scarlet face more flame-eaten than ever, bolted about on her bench and glared pitchforks at the coarse intruder.

"Order!"

Down came the tack-hammer. It kept coming down for a minute or two.

"We will proceed to the balloting," was Deacon Swartwood's single sentence when a semblance of order was assured.

The plain, inch-square pieces of white paper were distributed.

"I object to allowing the children to vote," spoke up a young fellow, Hartson by name, a newcomer to the community. "They are under age. They cannot vote under twenty-one in this state."

"But they are church members, Mr. Hartson. And this is not a political meeting."

"I never heard of such proceedings," the newcomer commented, seating himself, turning to a wall of blank, set faces behind him.

Gilbert suddenly saw through the whole neat strategy. Where were his friends—Dr. Pilder, Oliver Peace and his brother, William? Where was Jim Cummings? It was common knowledge that no such move would be forthcoming this night. Absent.

This accounted for the unexpected influx of the malcontents, friends of the malcontents, children of the malcontents.

But the one unpardonable affront was Deacon Swartwood's request that he open the cut-and-dried affair with prayer and invoke God's blessing on man's rascality. Talk about political engineering in Washington along subterranean channels!

"The No's have it by fifteen votes. This is the majority out of one hundred and five cast."

Gilbert was, at that instant, on his feet.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you have done an awful thing tonight!"

His words cut and slashed like knives. They trembled, tumbled out, hot and incriminating.

"The insolence of this betrayal is terrible! Requesting me, ladies and gentlemen, to invoke God's blessing on my own funeral! Kicking me out like this—winter coming on, conditions the way they are in the state. Where can I find another pastorate now? This treachery is monstrous!"

"I won't sit here and hear this man's futile ravings!"

Mrs. Rutgers jerked to her feet, her pert little nose bobbing about like a wood-pecker, pulling at her coat, burrowing her hands into a large brown muff.

"C'm on, Wally—and you, Sam! This meeting has expressed its mind. We don't care to listen to his epithets!" The tiny ankles propelled the wide, expansive waist-line out the door, the face crimson, pert, superior, passing down the aisle, the fiercely-white eyes looking neither to the left or right.

Evelyn lunged to her feet, her face pale as a ghoul's.

"Honest, folks, you've not been fair at all. When the story of this meeting gets out; if the newspapers get hold of it—" Evelyn broke down,—a most unexpected phenomenon. She whirled a handkerchief to her eyes, buried her eyes in it, slid from the church.

"If you folks don't repent of this vicious evil, this country church will be closed! God can't bless this sort of work!" Again Gilbert lunged at the now frightened, anxious elders. "You've got your scheming heads together instead of your hearts. You've worked your strategies, rather than your knees. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm afraid this is the end! May God have mercy on your poor souls!"

"I don't think anger gets one anywhere!"

Mil Crouse's precise schoolma'am's voice, trying hard to preserve its customary even quality of tone, spoke up from the rear of the chapel.

Children were now tittering, laughing, scolding. Purdy and McBride were loudly talking and gesticulating to each other. Red Stevenson and Purdy's boy, Lawrence, were having a violent struggle in the last seat.

Hastily Deacon Swartwood closed the session that had automatically become a riot act. For a few moments the meeting continued its furor unaware that it no longer had an excuse for being.

Swartwood, Purdy, McBride and Miss Crouse moved over to the young pastor.

"Ah—Brother Chalmers—we do not like to have you leave under a cloud, that is, with hard feelings. Stay with us through the winter season, till spring. That will save the face of things, make them look better." Swartwood had found his most engaging manner. He was in remarkably good voice tonight.

"Sure. That's the consensus of opinion among the Board," McBride chirped.

"Goes fer me, too!" added Purdy, looking over at Mil Crouse, wagging his head.

"I don't know what to do," Gilbert answered, struggling hard to master another rising, violent outburst. "We've just purchased quite a stock of good furniture for the manse, on the credit plan. Three hundred dollar indebtedness."

"That ain't our look-out!" McBride hastily slid in.

"It is rather a shame," Swartwood consoled. "We'll—that is, the Board will try to show leniency—leniency. That is a good Christian virtue. Maybe we can induce the Rutgers to let you remain six more months. I think we can patch things up for a spell longer, with a little caution and charity."

Dazed, bewildered, fairly paralyzed, Gilbert took leave of the judgment hall where he, too, had been falsely incriminated, out-voted and sentenced, where he had listened to the desolating cry, "Away with him!" Also an outcast—with a fierce, shuddering Cross on his shoulders that Religious Phariseeism and Creed-Mumblers had grimly imposed. He was so sorry that the children had been dragged innocently into the whole-sale betrayal. He recalled a Biblical sentence. "His blood be on us—and on our children."

Outside the church Sam Rutgers, hanging around, smoked a cigarette, twitting the girls. As Gilbert passed Rutgers let

go a nasty fling against young, upstart parsons. Gilbert, white-faced, eyes grim and angry, leaped over to Rutgers. Two strong, fierce hands seized hold of Sam.

"Take your dirty hands off me!" the short, padded youth yelled, wriggling vainly in the vice of steel, staring, frightened into the stern, deliberate features above him. Revulsion swept over Gilbert in an overwhelming tide for this creeping, crawling thing—a young, empty-headed, swash-buckling fool, more sinned against than sinning.

"Take my hands off? With pleasure!"

Gilbert, sneering at the sniveling creature cringing from his face, withdrew his fiercely throbbing fingers and started across the road.

A hand shot from the darkness, grabbed his and shook his hand, strongly, proudly.

"You're a regular guy. I'm with you. Anything I can do to help I'll be glad to do. Call on us soon." Young Hartson, the new resident, imparted a world of friendliness and good cheer in a hand-clasp.

"Thanks."

Further down the road he heard behind him the swift, recurring footfalls of somebody, stealthily approaching. He did not turn about until fingers were wrapped about one arm.

"I'm so sorry."

It was Selma, her face also full of pride, pain, wistfulness.

"Oh, I'll be all right. I've weathered storms before."

"Quite like this?"

"No."

"Please don't get discouraged. We are your friends, dozens of us. We believe in you; we believe in the things you live and preach."

"God bless you for saying that."

"I mean it. And I speak for many more. Please don't

get discouraged and think we are all against you."

"Why should I?"

"Well, I might in your place. But we—we really love you very much! Gee! I don't know what we'll do when you go away. I don't!"

Selma squeezed one of his hands until he winced with sudden pain. Then, choking, stumbling for words, she hid her face, bolted from him and vanished into the cold, October darkness.

As he journeyed home to the manse, quite some distance from the church, purchased by the elders with the idea of a bargain in mind rather than that of expediency, Gilbert became suddenly aware of the dry, parched, brittle clatter of autumnal leaves, as the strident wind tore beauty from desired, strategic positions on gracefully arched branches.

In the illumination of an arc lamp they were whirled unmercifully down and driven away from long-loved, familiar haunts. Gilbert noticed, first impressed by the wild, striking beauty of the thrilling picture, the gayly-hued leaves almost ghoulish things against light and darkness, danced into grotesque combinations and bizarre figures by the October furies.

A portion of a seasonal poem swept through his mind as out of the great, black void.

"The melancholy days have come,
The saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds and naked woods
And meadows brown and sere."

At home Evelyn had something to say before she mentioned retirement.

"Religion? See, Gilbert, there isn't any these days! They would crucify you as they crucified Another. What do they know about love, good will, mercy? Religion is a matter of

Sunday mental exercises, creedal gymnastics and formal worship postures. But as for beautiful, heroic, radiant living, where is religion today?"

"Love—truth—goodness—beauty—empty, idle, worthless words in the main," he confessed bitterly. "Of all fools we religious dreamers are the damnedest!"

It was an unexpected shocking outburst.

"Gilbert!" Evelyn censured violently.

"What the hell!"

Gilbert bolted out of doors, walked again the thin, curved, bleak country roads, bent his forehead to the chill, smarting winds, watched the hordes of beauty being vanquished by the soulless breeze and whirled helplessly here, there, everywhere through the night.

Again the line seized him—"The melancholy days have come." Again he lived through an annual meeting run by people who prided themselves on their outstandingly vital Christianity.

Beauty. Melancholy.

These two words, anything but twins, resolved themselves into his world—or, better, into two worlds that fought for mastery over his attention. They shone in the autumn leaves when the arc lamps sprinkled them with subtle diamonds. They whirled in the increasing winds that tried to shake the stubborn hills to pieces.

When Gilbert returned home the porch light was still on, though the rest of the house was in total darkness.

TO WINDWARD

Even Evelyn, of late, had become unmercifully irritable.

"What are we going to do in a few weeks?" she stormed one day. "They won't keep us here forever. If you can't find another parish, that won't help matters. They'll turn us out in mid-winter." Nervously, jerkily she fussed with a newspaper in the parlor.

"I don't think so. They aren't quite so bad as all that." Gilbert, himself high-strung, impressionable, endeavored to quiet Evelyn.

She swept on, uncomfortable.

"And we were so nicely settled! I really like this place, some of the people. It's an ideal resort in the summer time. You know, being a minister's wife, isn't all it's cracked up to be! Come and go, come and go. I suppose it will be like this all the rest of our lives. A minister's wife can't ever hope to have a home of her own!"

"Should have considered that matter before you married me!" Gilbert closed the Bible he was scanning, next Sunday's sermon settling in mind, gradually taking shape.

"Mother always said my best thoughts come afterward!" Evelyn commented, dropping one section of the paper, gathering another.

"How in blazes can I get in the mood for Sunday's sermon with an infernal wrangle always about my ears!" exploded

Gilbert, closing the Bible with a blistering snap.

"That's fine talk from a preacher!" Evelyn lunged.

"And fine talk from a wife!" Gilbert shot back.

Evelyn, a little later, was ashamed of herself for the unnecessary outburst. She said more than she had planned to. Usually did in an argument. That was why she generally detoured arguments. But apologies were difficult for her. Gilbert, for considerable time, did not suspect that Evelyn regretted her luckless words.

A few unpleasant conversations set many marriage barques adrift. The ropes loosen, old cordage gives way in the sweep of new flood tides and there is no anchor to hold.

Evelyn and Gilbert failed to have a heart-to-heart talk about things. The active, alert little wife planned to—but she made postponement her stock-in-trade. She loved Gilbert and was deeply sympathetic with his misfortunes.

She only avoided the child question because of a vast, inner fear. Cæsarean births and—deaths—had been common in her family. The idea of adoption had not taken hold of her. But she did prefer Gilbert to any other man she had met—to date—and could think of being the wife of no other.

She did not imagine how greatly Gilbert craved human sympathy and understanding. She did not suspect in him an unseen vast that hungered for congenial companionship in the realm of his dreams. She never knew the inner craving of heart that was his, to know that others dined on the banquet his spirit provided in sermons, paintings, conversations.

She would have been horrified to learn the truth of her own innate selfishness, unwilling to hazard herself in order to build a married couple into the divine family; she would have been stunned to realize how little sometimes she gave him of that adulation, worship and camaraderie which he so vitally and unfailingly craved.

For instance, take the night in the front room, after choir practice. Selma had run in. The three were enjoying a friendly chat in the parlor.

Gilbert had displayed a new painting of the Berkshires by moonlight, an idyllic interpretation of restful, dream-pearled nature.

"I still like my clothesline the best!" Selma judged, smiling, her head slanted, a custom in interested conversation, her eyes focused steadily on the artist.

"You have queer tastes, don't you, Selma?" Evelyn ventured. "To prefer that ordinary thing to his glorious marines and landscapes."

"Maybe I have. But I know more about my back yard than about mountains and oceans, don't I?"

Her question, so simple, so frank, required no answer. None was given.

Gilbert continued.

"Women are queer creatures. Paint them a couple of birch trees by a river's brink, a grassy slope, colorful reflections, a bit of still life, and that's all they want. As for oceans, surf, wind-torn vasts. No! They can't stand it! But, then, each man to his taste and each woman to her canvas. That's quite logical. It is fortunate we all don't want to live on the same hill or park around the same mud puddle!"

Laughter flitted about the room. The eyes of Selma lifted and fastened, worshipfully, to a sun-splashed back yard where drying clothes, wind-blown, shone in the sun.

"Yes, it's nice to have expensive tastes," Evelyn went on, "and to paint beautiful scenery. But if Gil doesn't find a church soon, we'll both be in the poorhouse!" An unexpected twist to conversation, unpleasantly practical.

"Poorhouse?" echoed Selma, huge wonder in her eyes. "You two in the poorhouse? How could that be?" Her vision

was withdrawn from the wall; she searched Gilbert's face.

"Better than we have gone," Evelyn judged. "Dear! Gil has tried a dozen churches. Nothing in sight yet." She turned wearily back to some sewing she had recently rummaged from the sewing basket.

"I just couldn't think of you two going to the poorhouse," Selma ventured again. "It just wouldn't make sense."

"Lots of things don't make sense these days," Gilbert blurted. "Here am I. Three years in college and three in seminary. Five years in Hill Grove. Eleven years preparing for one job. And I'm out—clean out! Where? What? Who? Looks now like I've got to shift professions."

"Change professions?"

Evelyn laid down her sewing and stared up into her husband's decided eyes. "You certainly aren't thinking of that? You never mentioned that before. Why, what would your people say? And mine?" A spool of thread tumbled to the floor.

"I don't care what they'd say. If one comes to a dead end on one road, the only thing I see to do is to go back and get on another!" Gilbert sat forward in his chair, his right hand gesticulating. He sounded as though he was preaching.

Selma only stared,—the vibrant, heightening dialogue had taken possession of her.

"And throwing eleven years away, your training, standing, library, education, experience? Oh, Gil, don't be a fool!" Evelyn finished and reached for the runaway spool.

"A fool? What am I now, preaching for twenty-five a week to men who voted me out? What am I now?" He howled it at her. "Do you think I like to get up there every Sunday and preach to those who don't want to hear me, only to get a week's envelope? What is that? Is it heroism, courage, manhood? Would you do it?"

He yelled at his wife who stared, with blanched countenance, at Gilbert's overwhelming passion.

"I—wouldn't!"

It was quiet, resolute Selma who interrupted the violent tirade. Gilbert swung around.

"Darn right you wouldn't! Neither would Evelyn or any self-respecting person!"

"Then why do you?"

Evelyn recovered voice, perhaps strengthened by Selma.

"Because lots of things don't make sense these days. I'm afraid to be heroic. I'm a coward, a plain, rotten coward. I'm afraid to shove off from the old; I'm afraid to make a break with a dismal past. I'm afraid to begin again. And I, the one who proclaims heroism to youth, I'm the prize coward of the Lord's flock!"

He strode to the piano, to the parlor table, to the divan and back to his chair. He swept again to the divan and bent toward his wife, stooping over, his words coming out in an onrushing stream.

"But I've had enough! I'm done—all through—I'm out of all this! Lock, stock and barrel, as dad used to say. Sunday is my last sermon."

"But—but this would be sudden," Evelyn cautioned. "If you did—"

"I preach my last sermon to that crowd Sunday!" His voice was steadier; his words in better control. "People will support me and like me and my things, or they won't support me at all."

Both young women were thrilled by this sudden, daring display. Selma's eyes, brilliant with pride, fastened to and clutched every facial grimace.

"I don't know but what you're right," Evelyn said, rising, coming over to him. Selma said nothing. Her eyes continued to worship.

CRISIS

It is not often that a pastor, these days, makes calls and requests too earnest persons to please remain away from a church service. But that hour came in the life of the Reverend Gilbert Chalmers.

The first Sunday in every second month the Hill Grove communicants celebrated the Lord's Sacrament or Supper. It was called a communion service; communion with God; communion with one another.

"He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Gilbert, reading this scriptural sentence, suddenly decided to make two pastoral calls before the coming Sunday.

He arose early in the morning of Friday, a clear, bright November day, spent considerable time in prayer, had breakfast with Evelyn and at table informed her of his purpose.

"Won't do any good," she said firmly. "Rutgers and Swartwood will be there just the same."

Gilbert, notwithstanding, walked resolutely down the winding tree-arbored country road. He noticed the bare, grim boughs that had been robbed of their sudden exotic wealth by the long, fierce winds that had prevailed. Already folks were astir, raking up the thick mounds of autumn leaves, burning them. Beautys recent, glorious horde of priceless wealth was, so soon, committed to the funeral pyre.

Gilbert inhaled the crisp, frosty air, giving attention to the slowly mounting sun and a far, faint film of cloud slowly settling on the western horizon. Passing the church he dared not look at the wayside pulpit; his name would be scratched out shortly and his own bequeathals, piled up within those gates, obliterated. Dreading his mission, yet certain of its necessity, he approached the Rutgers farm—a half mile from the town center on a side road.

His summons on the front door was not met by a direct answer. The front curtains rustled. Gilbert knew he was sighted from within. After patient waiting Mrs. Rutgers, fussing with a dress evidently put on in haste, invited the pastor inside, complaining of the unconventional time of this pastoral call.

"I'm—I'm not in the habit of receiving callers at this early hour."

The crimson cheeks, the pert nose, the rotund little chin, the grey, popping eyes,—they all seemed to be in prosperous condition.

"No, I didn't come to make a prolonged call, Mrs. Rutgers. I have come to ask a favor."

"A favor? Is that so. Well, a favor. I hope it hasn't anything to do with the church meetin', because Wally and me and Sam—only had the good of the parish in mind. Of course you understand that. We felt it to be our bounden duty, so to do. But—a favor? Why, won't you step right in? 'Course it's a mite early and the house is such a sight, but—"

"I only called to remind you that next Sunday is Communion Sunday—"

"Oh, we knew that. We are thoroughly familiar with the church calendar, Mr. Chalmers, thoroughly familiar." The voice was again hardening.

"I do not doubt that, What I came to ask as a favor was

this—that you and the Mr. and Sam stay home next Sunday.”

“What?”

Clearly the lady was taken off guard. She stuttered, stammered, puffed, wheezed, colored up, from red to purple, and the poise of her whole body admitted this new surprise attack.

“Why Mr. Chalmers, in all my life I never heard such a thing! You—a minister of the church, trying to forbid righteous people, communicants, their right to take the holy sacrament. Why, Mr. Chalmers, this is preposterous!”

“Nevertheless, this is my request. Under the circumstances it will be very difficult to celebrate the Lord’s Supper on Sunday. The Supper symbolizes love and fellowship. Neither is in your heart, Mrs. Rutgers, or in the hearts of this household.”

“See here, Mr. Chalmers, you can’t stay on that door step and say them things right to my face! Who do you think you are? Such insolence I never heard or saw before from a human being! We will go to church next Sunday as usual! It is our church, Mr. Chalmers, not yours. And, you have been a parasite long enough in our community, living off it, contributing nothing.”

“I have made my request. It would only be mockery and hypocrisy for you, with this bitterness in your heart, to pledge love and fellowship in the Communion Service.”

“We don’t want none of your crazy sermons here!”

The face blazed, the eyes threw out a flame that singed and the front door was slammed shut.

The call at Deacon Swartwood’s fared no better.

“Come in, Brother Chalmers, and let us pray over this matter,” the portly, leather-faced man suggested. “Let us not be hasty in such things. You are not the only pastor who has lost a pulpit by popular vote. Let us quiet ourselves and try to get the sweetness of the Lord. Then things will look differ-

ent." Again the engaging, salving tone of voice and the suave, smooth smile.

"I wouldn't waste my time praying with you! Your prayers don't go higher than your head! God heareth not the cry of sinners! That is Bible, Deacon Swartwood!"

"You are a little unreasonable, Mr. Chalmers. You shouldn't let a little set-back like this ruin your whole life."

Gilbert had all he could do to keep his fists from breaking up that nicely artificial countenance of sham courage.

"I can't give the emblems of love and sacrifice to you, deacon. I give you fair notice." And away he went.

The dreaded Sunday morning came and a fine audience. The Rutgers family came ambling in as usual. Deacon Swartwood sat in his pew far front.

Gilbert had selected for a theme: "What a Christian Lives For." His text was from St. Paul's writings: "Peace, then, and the building up of one another; these are things toward which we must aim."

The service became a nightmare to him.

Peace. Where was it? Strife, intrigue, slander, gossip, rampant in their midst. Building up one another? So very many were unmercifully tearing down everybody else.

He endeavored to preach love—but there was Deacon Swartwood's smooth smile, Mrs. Rutgers' pompous, imperious attitude, Nellie Purdy's grey, nonchalant countenance, McBride's disinterested manner, slumping far down in the pew.

He tried to preach fellowship—but he faced a caste system in New England as deadly as any in India. He tried to preach forgiveness—facing a dense, dark wall of unforgiving hearts. He caught sight of Millie Laramee sitting in a far corner. Was she also afraid of the dark wall he feared?

Between the pastor and the people was a white table spread. On it there was bread broken, and wine poured out,

symbolizing a love so great, so tender, so beautiful that he could not relate That Life to the lives of the Church Board. Gilbert, struggling to preach Christian ethics to these hard, opinionated folk glorying in the mean little advantages they were able to get over one another, felt a load oppressing him, heart, mind and flesh.

Thank God, Mr. Hartson was in the audience, John Cummings, Alma, Lew and Flossie, Anzelm and Anna—the commoners. Not of the ruling order, but of the rank and file. Behind him Selma was seated at the organ and Nan Thurston, Jim Cummings and other friends who were looking kindly at him.

The brief, sketchy address was soon concluded.

Deacons Rutgers and Swartwood began to move up the church aisle, one in the right, one in the left, to participate in the Communion Service, remembering the love and grace of the amazing Galilean.

Suddenly the hypocrisy, the shallowness, the deep, dark tragedy of all this hollow pretense of Christian discipleship came whirling in upon Gilbert. Brotherhood? NO! Forgiveness? NO! Self-sacrifice? NO! Love? NO!

The two deacons were now at the white-draped table. Three chairs stood there, one for each, the pastor's between.

It was time now to sing the hymn—

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian Love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that Above.

It was time now to request the choir to file down into the front pews. It was time now to leave the pulpit and give the welcome to the Feast of Fellowship. It was time now to wed human hearts to Christ and to each other, to pray for and

bless one another. It was time now to hold lover's tryst with the spiritual realities.

Two overwhelming emotions mastered him, in swift, cataclysmic strokes.

First. He loved these people, many of them. Lew and Flossie O'Brien. He looked for them every Sunday morning. They always came in fifteen minutes late. But the farm chores were many. Mr. John Cummings, after the loss of his great, human-souled wife, had become suddenly friendly. Anzelm and Anna were present this morning. They always attended the Sacramental Service, hard times or not, reaching hands for bread and wine. Millie Laramée's round features seemed seraphic in a misty, far corner.

And Alma, with all her noise and bluster, good as gold to those in need. The Burton family—genial, hospitable country folks, driving in an old buckboard from North Society most every Sunday, with their six children.

Selma and Dagma were behind him in the choir loft, and the others. Dear, irreplaceable friends. Inexpressibly dear.

Relationship with them was thus abruptly, brutally severed by a half dozen stern, opinionated, unbending church officials, all over fifty. They had frustrated him in love's conquest. A hard, unyielding wall that shut him away from his heart's dearly loved people.

Gilbert, swept by great, sincere, tremendous passion, burst into sudden, desolating prophecy.

"We cannot build the Kingdom of God along these lines—gossip, whispering campaigns, slander, political engineering! We criticize government for underhanded lobbying, bribery, snobbery, special privilege. All these have become the tactics of the so-called Christian Church!

"Some of you cry down the riff-raff, the undesirables. There are no undesirables in a Christian Society. All are dear

and precious, one to another. Only in equality and brotherhood can the Kingdom of God come down upon us.

"The mean, artificial, superior attitudes that rule this church and make religion a matter of creeds, tapered windows, worship postures, a stiff thing centering in forms and ceremonies, feast and fast days, and not in helping and blessing one another, even the humblest, will destroy this sanctuary and kill religion dead as a door-nail in this community."

"C'm on, Sam, lets get out of here!"

Mrs. Rutgers, face purpling with fury again, jerked her curiously hatted head around, bobbed her pert little nose defiantly at the pastor, the choir and everyone and swept ceremoniously from the sanctuary.

Sam grabbed his hat and coat and clumsily, sheepishly withdrew. Purdy lunged into the aisle, his Nellie at his side.

A silence that could be felt, that was cruel and painful, prevailed. Sweat drenched Swartwood and Rutgers, still lingering at the Lord's Table, apparently paralyzed. Rutgers' face, for once bereaved of its pinkness, looked ghoulish.

"I can't!" cried the pastor, his body shaking like alders on a wind-torn knoll. "I can't do it!"

He bent as if shrunk, suddenly weak, exhausted, over the pulpit, his face suffused with pain. All knew how greatly and poignantly he suffered, as in helpless mien he turned to the audience.

How greatly he missed Evelyn nobody knew. If she were only here, to strengthen him by her eyes, to comfort him by her presence, to break the vicious spell that was breaking him. But she was in New Haven this morning, worshipping with her folks in a distant auditorium.

"I cannot serve the Sacrament! We are not brothers! You must forgive me!"

Gilbert glanced pitifully, weakly at the two paralyzed men at the Lord's Table, then looked, for a last time, into the uplifted faces of children in the sun-streaked pews.

Gilbert, with strong, terrifying outcry, sank to his knees on the platform, his hands clutching at the open Bible, the walnut sacred desk. He crumpled up beside the pulpit crying convulsively, his body shaking fiercely in unsuspected, awful emotion. It was a blinding, overwhelming flood that tore him to pieces. He could only fall prey to it and let its violence spend itself on him.

"O God!" he cried, again and again, choking, gasping for breath, clawing at the pulpit, bending his head almost to the carpeted floor. "Oh God!" he wept, cried, groaned, over and over again, until two old ladies, frightened, terribly upset, left the church.

Gilbert became conscious that a hand was upon his arm. Hartson was speaking to him.

"I know how hard this is, brother. But hadn't you better go on with the service?"

"I can't! I can't, honest. Please don't ask me to!"

The lights in his eyes could hardly pierce through the swollen floods that all but engulfed them.

He became aware that Mr. Cummings, Nan Thurston and Selma were standing near him, around the base of the pulpit-platform.

"Don't take things so hard. Please, Gilbert. We are your friends."

Selma was venturing conversation, almost in a whisper. Her very soul crossed that frail bridge of words and entered into his own soul, bringing a strange, new courage.

"You are still—our pastor."

Nan was speaking. One hand of hers was touching sympathetically his thick, black hair.

Swartwood and Rutgers, exchanging silent, meaningful things with face and eyes, slowly passed down the church aisles, away from the immaculately white, untouched table.

That was the signal that church was dismissed.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Lew and Flossie O'Brien, Hartson, Nan Thurston and Selma remained in the church to hearten Gilbert long after the audience had left.

"Ye know now what I meant when I said I wouldn't join the church 'cause I reckoned I'd end me days in peace," Lew remarked, getting his corn-cob out of his pocket.

"Lew!" Flossie scolded, her eyes hugely looking at the thing. "Lew! Put that away! This is the house of God!"

"The house of who?" Lew jerked nervously back. "The house of some old fuddy-duddies, if ye ask me!"

"Evelyn is away?" Flossie ventured. "Missed her this morning."

"Yes. With her folks in New Haven. Not feeling well last week. All upset, herself, over this wrangle. Minister's wives don't have the easiest life on earth."

"I've often thought of that," Flossie decided, her voice in a rising crescendo. "I've often wondered how Evelyn was taking all this gossip and slander. Enough to drive anybody insane! Dear! And we are supposed to be church people!"

"Ain't even civilized. Huh! Talk about makin' bad people good? The church ain't even makin' good people nice!" Lew declared, grinning, then seemingly surprised at his wit, grinning wider.

"Then you're going to have dinner alone?" Selma question-

ed, putting on her overcoat, Gilbert helping her into it.

"If I care for any."

"I don't think you should be alone today!" Flossie judged.

"Have dinner with us!" Selma encouraged, instantly.

"We'd love to have you. Chicken, too. Your favorite dish. We'd all love to have you. Honest."

"Maybe I will."

"Of course you will," Selma urged.

"Yes, I would!" Flossie continued. "The way you're feeling."

"I'm all right now. A passing emotion. I feel a thousand times better already. Haven't had a good cry in years."

"It was more than that," Nan ventured precisely.

"Yes, it was," Gilbert owned. "I begin to realize now how another Young Man felt who wept over Jerusalem."

Soon Lew, Flossie and Nan, blessing their pastor, went their ways. Gilbert and Selma turned in the opposite direction.

"I'll stop at the house a moment," Gilbert suggested.

Passing the garage again, in a few minutes, Gilbert heard a noisy, blustering dialogue between Ean Hatt, an old, wizened farmer, and Obadiah.

Selma excused herself a minute and entered the Howard place. She had to see Janet a moment about Grange business—Booster Night. Gilbert waited at the gate, outside.

"Didn't see ye at the taxpayers' meetin' t'other night." Ean, seventy-two, round shouldered, abundantly whiskered, with sharp, rasping voice, was pitching into Obadiah.

"Nope. Don't go out evenin's any more."

"Ain't as old as I be."

"Nope."

"Shoulda bin there."

"Rather sit by the fire and read the paper."

"That ain't no public spirit, be it?"

"It's my spirit."

"But that's the trouble with the town!" Ean's right, grizened hand was poking up perilously near Obadiah's nose. He deftly got it out of range.

"What's the trouble?"

"Men like you!"

"Me? I don't do no harm, do I? Mind me own bee's wax. That's allus bin my prin-ci-pal."

"But ye don't take no interest in the town's doin's."

"Reckon ye're right."

"But that ain't right, it's wrong! Ya don't help ta straighten out the town!"

"Can't straighten it out." Obadiah threw out a line of liquid that splattered against the Howard's white fence. Ean stared at the brown disfigurement.

"Missed it that time—caught the fence," Ean scolded, looking at the nearby elm tree-trunk amply painted.

"Yep. Do sometimes."

"We needed votes on the W. P. A. bus'ness." Ean struck into conversational stride again. "'T'other Friday, when it looked like rain, them good-fer-nothin' fellers stopped work on my road. We farmers, we got to work, rain er shine, at ten cents a hour and support them good-fer-nothin' fellers at forty cents a hour, loafin'. Is that justice, Eh?"

"I don't like to butt into politics. Like to be in peace. Let them that likes to butt in, butt in; and them that likes to keep out, keep out. Ain't that sense?" A long speel for Obadiah.

"No it ain't! The town's the town! And them W. P. A. fellers is sinkin' money, timber and cement rebuildin' the old Town Hall. It's an eyesore and it's settlin' enyhow. Why didn't they rip 'er down and fetch up a new one?"

"Don't know. S'pose they knew why."

"See here, Obadiah, ye're awful ornery, an awful ornery

critter today. What's eatin' ya?" Ean's thin, wizened face was thrust violently near Obadiah's and his right finger spun back to the danger zone.

"I'm a man of peace."

"Shucks!"

"Sure am. I'm jes settled in me ways."

"Settled? Caboodle! Ye're an old fool what's got stuck in the mud!"

"Got twice as many friends in 'town as ye can boast, Ean. And I didn't peddle no apple-jack durin' temp'rance times."

"Hush up!" Ean glanced, frightened, over toward the preacher and his right hand hit Obadiah's nose.

"Heh! Watch out!" snapped Obadiah, letting go of another mouthful.

"Watch out yerself!" howled Ean. "I felt the spatters o' that on me chin!"

"Wall, I didn't ask fer no Sunday argee-ment, did I? And I wouldn't go to no taxpayer's meetin' ef ye have to float tha hull W. P. A. works yerself!"

Whereupon Obadiah thrust his hands into his pant's pockets and, as all unconcerned and oblivious to the world, lumbered and rolled down the road. For a minute Ean stared at the unmannerly withdrawal, then slowly hitched away in the opposite direction, mumbling.

Gilbert, listening, enjoyed the passing scene. He forgot his own bitter portion. And moreover, what human, interesting people there were in the world outside the church, all fighting problems! Was there serious truth in Lew's contention; That the church, as an organized body, is frequently not worth bothering with as an institution to join?

When Selma returned to the gate Gilbert, refreshed, accompanied her up the road.

He thoroughly enjoyed the fricassee dinner, potatoes, beets,

creamed cabbage, butter churned from their own dairy cream, Finnish cake, apple fungus. A large table was spread in the dining room and the warm friendliness of these simple, genial people who only receive one open-hearted, after one has proved one's worthiness, greatly stirred the outcast-pastor.

After dinner, wishing to walk, to get away among the impersonal, beautiful, friendly woodlands he loved, Gilbert announced his whim and crossed the pastures to the hills beyond.

It was an unusually warm afternoon for the third of November. Indian Summer. Or better, a foretaste of the coming springtide.

A curious, confused situation. Delicious, invigorating warmth making fond invasion of stern, grim-clad woodlands, bereaved of beauty, doomed to winter's winding sheet of snow and the long denouement of ice. Bare, empty hands were pitifully, hopelessly stretched out everywhere to this new, thrilling flood of sun-sweet air that could give no life or yield of buds, blossoms, greenery.

Stark, helpless giants were the white oaks, elms, walnut trees, an apple orchard, standing hopelessly, waiting for the passing of delicious winds that had no kind of wealth to give.

Gilbert plunged through drifts of autumn leaves that crackled beneath his feet and released a dry, fragile brown dust that covered him.

"The melancholy days have come."

Again the poetic line, grimly suggested by these woods. And a quatrain from Lord Byron, one he quoted sometimes in sermons when discussing the end of a selfish, sensual life.

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone."

Up and down the brown-mantled woodland slopes he roved, over grey-cold ledges heaped with autumn's shrivelled, decaying gold, along the banks of a tiny, voiceful stream, exceedingly boisterous for its size that, to the tune of its own resistless music, sought shelter in some unknown vast and fell impatiently and incessantly on toward the far, wide sea.

He noticed still the stout sumac torches, yielding a ruddy haze, standing by the grey-rock ledges, the intriguingly bright bayberries, the deathless green of cedars and certain perennial ferns.

The dualism of these bleak November woods affected him. The brown, burnt-out decay everywhere, the irresistible denouement of nature. The futility of a life of beauty. Spring's delicate loveliness, summer's verdant luxuriousness, autumn's breathless cataclysm of glamour—all of no avail. Winter's shrouds to fold them all and lay these dead away.

But a few privileged characters were in the woods. Cedars, pines, hemlocks, evergreens. Grim, proud, continuing giants. No sun, wind, rain or snowstorm snatched their deep, vivid greens away. No winter blast whirled off their stubborn cloaks. These few, scattered denizens of the woodlands remained, still conquerers.

So it seemed to be in life.

Most peoples were maples, elms, birches, oak trees. Soon shrivelled and withered. Only a few lived through the seasons and years unconquered and valiant. Could he be classed with the lordly pines, the kingly cedars? Undoubtedly not. He was too human, too sensitive, too impressionable.

Gilbert's feet finally circled about to Horse-Fly. The huge boulder was there—and would always be, perhaps the frolicking little stream. But the blinding canopies of green had gone, and the sun-haloed girl. Or—was she?

A voice sounded from behind. He turned, to glimpse her

coming down the woodland path.

"I thought I'd find you here. How well a woman knows!"

"What is this? Surprise attack?"

"No. Just wondered how you were. Hoped you'd not do something foolish."

"You afraid—afraid I'd do away with myself?" He scolded her from playful eyes. "Is that all the faith you have in me?"

"Not quite as bad as all that. I thought you might be lonely."

"Lonely with my friends?"

"Friends?" she questioned, her narrow, intense eyes fastened on him, searching every impression on his features, colorful in the November wind.

"Yes, these are my friends." He circled his arms about. "They never wound, disappoint or betray me. I have just been discovering them in a new way. I have just guessed why Jesus spent so much time on mountain slopes, in solitary places, in the wilderness."

"Why?"

"These are the only earthly friends one can really be sure of."

"Oh, foolishness, Gilbert! How you do talk! Sometimes I think you're a dreadful pessimist."

"But don't you know that Jesus was cast out of the synagogues, the temple, but never cast out of the woods? In a garden he spent his last night on earth, after religious leaders had closed church doors to him. The olive yard never cast him out. The trees sheltered and comforted him, as Sidney Lanier so beautifully put it in his verse, until enemies came and thrust him away.

"A tree sawn, cut into lengths, quartered, held his poor, wasted body and kept it from slumping wholly at the last. I'm sure Jesus loved trees. He cursed one once. But he was think-

ing of men and rotten religion when he did it!"

Selma listened, rapt, while Gilbert, in the woods, to the accompanying music of the stream, preached. He might burst into ethics and moralizing anywhere!

"This is my cathedral," he went on, a bit later. "The cathedral of beauty. Hill Grove people know almost nothing about it. They are aliens to their fields in their fields.

"Jesus, you know, grew up in lovely, sylvan, pastoral fields, where shepherds piped and children danced. His first sermon, in Nazareth, was one on life, light, freedom, beauty. Beauty for ashes—the oil of joy rather than mourning robes—the garments of praise preferable to the spirit of heaviness.

"The artist of life, Jesus, in that sermon, emphasized beauty, radiance, love-light, deliverance, the sweet clean things of the woodland. But those Nazareth farmers took offense and tried to kill him.

"Conventional synagogue or church religion has always crucified the lovers of beauty. I tried to bring a new, fresh approach to religion to these people. But they called me crazy, said I didn't know that New Testament because I thought in terms of beauty, color, radiance. They wanted the old conventional phrases and catch-words. With Jesus—I—leave the synagogue for the garden.

"Maybe I, too, have to sweat blood and be crucified! Or—maybe I can't stand up under the Cross! I'm not like Him! God help me! I don't know where I am!"

A fresh, sudden, frightening outburst. Gilbert kept his face turned from Selma, who wrapped both hands around one arm, reminding the pastor of a journey along snow-drifted, wind-whirled roads on a bitter-cold night.

When Selma looked upon his face again, she trembled. Pain, regret, torture, agony was in it. She shuddered.

"Why do you take things so hard? Gilbert, please don't. If you only knew how much some of us love you." All of a mother's gracious tenderness in the soft, anxious, modulated tones.

"But you can never know what it means! My ministry—my life—gone!" He groaned.

"But it isn't! You're young, well, strong. This is only a trifling experience, large for the moment, as Lew said."

"A trifling experience? God! I wish it was!" His face was turned upon her again, great fissures in his brow, his lips bloodless, cheeks a chalk white, eyes heaped with pain, moisture, white light, fear, desperation, agony.

"God! My dream-world's crumbled! Don't you know? Everything I've dared to believe in, hope for, pray for—the CHURCH—the thing I've consecrated everything to and for, the thing I'd have given all my life for—the CHURCH has flung it all back into my face! I'm a worthless, hateful thing! There is nothing to this love and brother business! I've been one big, terrible damn fool!"

"Gilbert, please! You know you don't mean it!"

"Don't, huh?" He glared down at her—and then his mood, as by magic, softened.

"Poor little fool, you try so hard to understand, don't you? But you'll never know. Yet I love you—you try so hard." He squeezed one of her hands tenderly, soulfully.

"Come on, let's go back," she suggested.

"Yes. But I have buried my dreams here in these woods, under the dead old leaves." Tears swam in his eyes. "I am such a fool!" he cried, drying eyes inflamed by wind and pain. "But it's true. The world that was the loveliest I ever dreamt has cracked up—and it's dead here, too, in these woods. I am now just a walking, helpless corpse."

The very stony bitterness of his voice announced his terrible, frank sincerity. Selma, her eyes burning, running over, hugged his arm more hungrily. Crying, wordless, she followed him slowly, painfully up the ragged, crooked nettlepath that led from the November woodland to the Kivella farmhouse.

CARNIVAL

Gilbert was pleased to remain for supper. Bread and raspberry preserves, cheese, coffee and cream, Finnish cake. Selma prepared the pastor an apple turnover—a special honor for the distinguished guest.

"I've missed Jack today," he remarked.

An intense seriousness swept over the mother's countenance.

"He's up in North Woodstock," Jan informed the inquirer, relieving the growing tension.

"Working?"

"Don't know. Guess so. Got an old, abandoned shack up there. Told Pete Mullins last month that he was making a go of things. Jack was always smart."

"We really feel better about Jack," Selma encouraged, her face brightening, eyes sparkling. "He has done fairly well this fall, from all reports. 'Course he is quite a ways away. But we don't mind that, so long as he's all right. We miss him, though, a great deal."

Supper dishes were stacked high in the sink, Gilbert was looking over Dagma's school books in the modest, plain living room, almost painfully barren of furniture, when a car rattled into the driveway, the horn blowing violently.

Two lusty, laughing young folks breezed into the kitchen.

"Hello, Selma!" the new girl's high-pitched, frolicking voice

exclaimed. "What ya doin' tonight? Like to go up to Danielson to the Carnival?"

"Where?" spoke up Jan.

"At Kum Along Inn."

"How do you know?"

"Saw it in the paper."

"I can't go tonight." Selma spoke quietly. "Got company."

"Who?"

"The minister."

"Oh, sorry. Well, s'long."

"Wait! Maybe we'll both go."

Gilbert stepped briskly, smiling into the kitchen.

"Hello Henry—Eedya. Sure I'll go, we'll go. How about it, Selma?"

"Why, yes, of course; if you care to. I had no idea—"

"Certainly we'll go!"

"Can I?" Jan begged. "I don't get out much."

"Come on," Henry urged. "That will fill up the car."

Mrs. Kivella stared, bewildered, at the minister. Dagma and Elsa, mouths agape, stared from their places.

"Huh!" The mother grunted, pointed Dagma toward the kitchen sink and, wrapping a shawl about her, lunged out doors.

While Henry wheeled the car along the thirty-mile stretch of cement state road to Danielson, Gilbert gave special notice to the rambling, helter-skelter conversations of the other four.

In front Henry and Eedya, Finnish young people from up country, reputed to be of Communistic tendency, had the time of their lives, keeping up the hilarious conversations at flood tide.

Eedya helped drive, chewed gum, made all manner of noises with it, chattered about movies, dances, parties, leaned hard up against the driver when the car swerved in the proper

direction. She kept up an untiring release about boys, girls, men, women, marriage, children, divorce, elopement, who loved who and who didn't.

Henry, a silent, smiling fellow, only dammed up the sparkling, vivacious torrent when something particularly teasing or trying compelled a retort. Selma entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the hour.

Rotaries were passed, intersections, towns and villages, and still the unperturbed, unrelenting torrent.

"Johnnie and Kate. They were at the party at the Twin Pines last week. Bet they're engaged, though they say they ain't. Gee! Does he go for her in a big way! Bill LaVolla couldn't touch her, even if he had a crowbar. Mary Moran—oh, boy! is she a knockout! Talk about yer dizzy blondes, lipstick, red finger nails and all! Bob LaVolla, he had a new dame to the Rink last week. Hot stuff, too, but a good-lookin' kid. Gave Henry here the glad hand and kept givin' it till I had to shoo her away. How about it, Henry?"

"Oh, she warn't so bad."

On and on Eedya went, hurdling, cavorting, gamboling through labyrinthine conversation, angering nobody, scandalizing nobody, tiring nobody, not even herself. A harmless, idle ever-ceasing flow, only ended by the brilliant many-colored lights of Kum Along Inn. A long, wide building, dancing floor, candy stalls, bowling alley, pool room in back, the place of indoor fall and winter carnivals.

Cars were parked in wild disorder every-which-way, fender lights snapped off and on, young couples delirious with merriment, the sound of a dance orchestra penetrating the increasing bedlam.

Gilbert took Selma's arm; Jan circled about to the other; Henry and Eedya led the way.

They passed in, waiting their turn, with others, glad to get

inside the thickly frosted windows with the warmth, the music, the delicious, care-free chatter.

Into the place of glamour and gayety they swept.

The music ceased, dancing couples began to drift toward the walls. A thousand rainbow colors were mingled with the black and grey. A beautiful, scintillating spectrum, dazzling and even gaudy beneath the brilliant yellow bulbs. Voices were blended into a gay, almost colorful hum, the total effect one of vivid merriment.

Again the music began and the floor began to fill with waltzing couples. Gowns of every hue flitted like mammoth butterflies in and out of ever changing scenes beneath the blinding lights of the low ceilinged building. Sounds of violins, cornets, trombones and saxaphones frolicked in and out of the sudden contoured aisles that appeared and vanished among the dancers.

Soft drinks and beer and wine were served at booths in one corner of the floor. Many people were using the settees lined against the walls.

Henry and Eedy checked their wraps and instantly embarked upon the waxed floor amid a vast, ever-changing sea of pleasant faces. Jan vanished.

"Let's sit and watch," Gilbert suggested.

"I'd love to. You know, I like it here. Everybody is just having a good time."

"They all seem to be enjoying life. This is the first time in nine years I have been to such a place on a Sunday night. Good thing I don't wear tails. What do you suppose would be happening now, if I did?"

"They would be obvious here, wouldn't they? Might spoil the fun."

"Think so?" Gilbert's voice became serious again. His face seemed churchly. "Think a preacher would end all this?"

"The conventional preacher would—the general Hill Grove type. They couldn't see this kind of thing at all."

"Why not?"

"It's sinful!" Selma spoke with grave precision.

"How do you know?"

"I've always been told that. But honest, Gilbert, I don't believe these girls, these fellows, I honestly do not believe that they'd have staged the show we had in that annual meeting. They may be rascals—but they aren't hypocrites. They're not cruel. They're human. They are young, work hard, love life and they'd—give you a chance."

"They do seem human, don't they?" He answered slowly, his eyes glancing from couple to couple, studying the twirling, restless, gaily cavorting things, finding time for this one night of sheer romance and fun in a hard, disillusioning world.

"Well, if it ain't the minister!"

Sam Rutgers whirled by, some slender, young thing with taffy-colored hair curled up about her ears, held in and jerked along by his long, awkward arms. In Sam's voice there was even a hint of friendly interest.

"Greetings!"

Gilbert raised his hand to his head in comical salute. Sam and the girl laughed and disappeared, the next instant, in the shifting mass.

"Maybe a half decent kid after all," Gilbert judged. "Get him away from his home and the old guard."

"And there's Nellie Purdy!" Selma exclaimed, nodding with her head into the crumbling walls of the dancers.

"Sure enough."

But if Nellie noticed the two Hill Grove citizens she gave no formal sign of recognition.

After this number, friends gathered about Selma and Gilbert, high school friends.

"Dance with me once, Reverend," a tall, pretty brunette coaxed, who gave her name as Audrey. "I've heard about you from Selma. I've never yet had the thrill of getting into the good graces of the clergy. What do you say? I dare you to take the next number with me!"

"Is that a dare?" Gilbert asked.

"A great big one," Audrey twittered back, blushing red, smiling in the most winsome manner, crinkling up her lovely, thickly billowed hair.

"Go on! Go on!" the young folks urged.

"How about it, Selma?"

"I'm going to take a turn with Henry." She reached for her friend's arm.

When the orchestra struck the opening chords to the next song the Reverend Chalmers, tall, with brown, wavy hair, in the immaculate black suit he had worn into the pulpit that morning, made hesitant invasion of a thronged dance floor.

"You dance charmingly," the girl enthused.

"Used to, in high school. But I've got rusty."

Gilbert felt the girl's innate, genial warmth. Her fingers, prisoned in his hands, pulsed with life and with its overflow. She was pretty; a sparkling, intriguingly alert personality; her lips handsomely contoured.

"Know who you're holding?" She asked, chuckling vivaciously.

"No. Who?"

"A great big terrible—pagan—one of the kind you love to preach against!" She grimaced horror, then broke into long, musical laughter that finally diminished into the same intriguingly delightful chuckle.

"Would you hit me?" he inquired.

"Not unless you got fresh."

"Would you enjoy hatching lies about me?"

"Of course not, silly! To tell the truth, I think you're most refreshing for a minister. Wish our old kill-joy were like you!"

"You do? But to return to my theme. Would you hate me for telling you the truth?"

"No. I'd probably get to loving you, if you did. What is truth?"

"That you're an adorable creature, Audrey. Really."

"You actually think so? You don't think I'm a hopeless, hell-bound pagan?"

"No, I don't. I'll swap most of my Official Board for you any day."

"I think you will, too."

"Why?"

"Oh, they're stiff and formal like the sermons they demand. You don't believe that religion is looking like grave-stones and hating all young, innocent gayety. You like wine, I bet, and young people—and weddings!"

"Why, that's almost a sermon," Gilbert whirled back, swinging the girl about with unusual vigor. "Wine and youth and weddings. Makes me think of a Bible story."

"I thought it would. Had it in Sunday school once. I told the teacher Jesus was a great scout, to make so much wine and help folks to have a sweller time at weddings. Oh boy, did I get an earful! But, you know, I never thought of the young man Jesus as a cross-budget in long, terrible black! Just couldn't! Bet He'd like it here tonight!"

"Why, Audrey, you're almost sacrilegious!" Gilbert assumed a preachy tone of voice and a churchly manner.

"Think so? Perhaps you do. But I don't! What is there here to hurt anyone? Youth having its right—a happy-go-lucky interlude in a fighting, cruel world gone crazy!"

"Whew! You should have been a pastor!" Gilbert exclaimed.

"I bet I could preach, if they'd let me!" She laughed again. "But I'm afraid once would be enough. But I think the Nazarene would clap some things I'd say even though I was kicked right off the pulpit!"

The music stopped. Sudden, deafening applause. The disintegrating walls of the dances.

"Thanks for the wonderful dance," Audrey said. "You know, it wouldn't be hard for a girl to fall for you."

"And thanks for the best sermon I've heard in ages," he returned.

Gilbert, seated again with Selma, related his unexpected experience.

"I know just how Audrey feels about these places. I don't feel the bitterness and censure and unreality that I felt in church this morning. I believe honestly, Gilbert, that the Nazarene, of the two places, would prefer this. He might provide new wine—His own kind—the kind you preached about once—if He were here."

"Hi! Reverend!"

Sam Rutgers passed again, this time a gaunt, scrawny blonde in his arms that towered above him like a steeple. He gave Selma a most annoying wink in passing. Gilbert watched him disappear.

"I believe I could get to like that fellow, keep him here," Gilbert commented. "Maybe you're right, Selma, and Audrey. Maybe the young lover of life, the Nazarene, if residing in Connecticut tonight, would be right here—making disciples, with a new Peter, James and John."

Selma's fingers slowly slipped over to one wrist and folded about it. The pressure spoke many volumes.

GROVE OF PINES

Gilbert met Lew at the General Store three days later, at mail time. Lew, his hands bulging with papers, notices, letters, advertisements, after a few casual remarks about familiar topics, struck into his main theme.

"D'ya ever see my grove of pines? Great big fellers! Bin standin' on the place for a century and more. Think I'd sell 'em? Nope! Never!"

What was this new story from Lew? Little by little Gilbert questioned him.

"The farmers around here think I'm crazy. Won't sell 'em! Nope! Never! I've bin offered a few dollars for lumber. Wall, them trees won't be dismembered and sawed down to chicken coops! Not if I go to the poor-house first!"

"What good are they?" Gilbert questioned, hoping he would speak freely.

"What good? Gad! I just like to see the big fellers standin' by the road! They'll be there long after I'm gone. They arrived long before me. What good? I like to know they're there! No farmer'll grow one o' them things in his generation!"

Conversation drifted away from and back to the grove of pines.

"Come up some time," Lew finally encouraged. "I'll give ya a squint at 'em. Tell me if ya'd sell em for a few paltry

dollars. Look at the size of 'em! I'll give ya a dollar for ev'ryone ya can put ya arms around!"

Two days later Gilbert, recalling Lew's urgent invitation, decided to accept.

He found Lew a mile back in his lot cutting brush and building for himself a beautiful pond in the interior of his large acreage. He showed Gilbert where he would build the dam and how wide the pond would be. He had always wanted a waterfall on the place.

"Flossie and me can sneak away from here together on summer nights and have lots o' fun!" He laughed and winked. (So farmers are immune to romance and beauty? Who says so?)

"Oh, but ya came to see the pines, didn't ya? They're off in another direction. About a half mile. T'other side o' the road."

He spoke as though they were his children, his loved ones. He had no other children. Proudly, eagerly he spoke of the favorite grove and-how long it would take to get there.

Gilbert knew that he would remember always the grove of giant pines in the bleak November woods, the light snow-fall of the preceding day easily vanquished by this morning's sun. The two tramped the crackling brush and dried leaves and moved about the throne-room of the straddling giant-kings. It was a glorious, clear autumn afternoon.

"Look at 'em!" Lew cried, grinning, chuckling in his dry as dust manner. "Think ya can get ya arms around them fellers? Go ahead! Dollar a head! Let's see ya!"

Gilbert knew by glancing at the pines that he need not waste time and provoke only laughter.

"See them other trees, all smaller, all dyin'?"

"Why?"

"Other trees can't live with the pines. They hog the sun

for themselves and eat up all the earth's grub below!"

Looking around at the tremendous, straight conclave of forest kings Gilbert thought of a line of verse and changed it a mite: "They are monarchs of all they survey."

"See how straight they are!" Lew enthused. He scanned them a moment and chuckled. "They even stand straighter than—a dominee!"

He beckoned the youth to stand beside him at the base of one tremendous trunk.

"Look up! Talk about a pillar o' the church. Look at that trunk! Run yer eyes along it. Straight as a plumb-line to the very top!"

Lew did not say a great deal. Vast chasms of silence split his paragraphs. His proud, challenging manner said more than his words. No man ever displayed his infants with more apparent pride and mastery than this grey-haired Irish farmer, who bragged about these familiar faces and moved with ease and joy among monarchs of the untamed vasts. They were his!

They grew on his land; they belonged to his estate. Folks would see them as they drove along the backwood's road. People would learn to thrill to them as he had. They were architectural wonders. Into these masterpieces of creation the Eternal Builder had incorporated "the hint of eternity", to use Lorado Taft's splendid phrase.

"Fool farmers before me on the place went and cut most o' the others down. These few are all that remain. Look!"

He pointed into the debris that always litters a pinegrove floor.

"Look!"

There was the outline of a tree trunk twice the size of any tree trunk standing.

"Man! What pines used to be here and would be still if men let 'em alone! Ya know—people like to tear things down

they can't ever replace. Church ain't the only place, dominee, where fool men bungle along and work agin their own best interests without knowin' it. A pretty gen'ral practice ev'rywhere, I should say, dominee!"

Gilbert was excited, thrilled by the gracefulness, the poetry, enthusiasm and devoutness of this aloof, gruff farmer as he moved among his unexcelled friends and swore eternal fealty to them, more by his proud, regnant manner than by his spasmodic bursts of vocal enthusiasm.

His regnant manner?

Precisely.

Familiarity with, long life with these kings of the earth had made him kingly. There was an aristocratic air to this man in his farm-togs, smoking his inseparable corn-cob, that Gilbert had realized in few others—even among those who were called great by the lordly of the earth. Lew had become like the kingly, glorious creatures with whom he had been happily and appreciatively associated.

Lew had been limping a little in the fall. He now tramped the brush spry as any man.

"Limp's gone," Gilbert ventured.

"Yep. Why not? Bin restin' lately."

Gilbert doubted that last fling. In another hour he would be bagging potatoes in the cellar of the old farmhouse and trucking many bushels to market.

Suddenly Lew became personal, his eyes penetrating, his tone of voice more arresting.

"What ya goin' to do, dominee? Stay in town?"

"Don't know. Take up art for a vocation, I suspect."

"And give up preachin'?"

"Yes—believe I will."

"Jes because ya got bumped here?"

"Every church is like this!" Gilbert shot back, his voice

hard, almost severe.

Lew grinned, drew on his corn-cob, discovered it to be black out, stopped walking, reached for a match, struck it against his overall's trouser-leg and held it to the tobacco, drawing on the pipe-stem, covering his face in a smoke screen.

"That's the trouble with a young guy that gets bumped. He thinks that everythin's gone by the board, everybody's like the feller that pasted him. Lots o' fine churches, dominee, lots o' 'em!"

"Where? Tell me where? I've written to Hartford, Providence, Boston, New York. Why, right in this state, in our own denomination, there are already three hundred unemployed ministers."

"Hundreds more mill hands, farmers, salesmen, clerks and the rest. Don't forget that! Ya're one o' many!"

"But we expect different treatment from church people."

"Maybe ya're right there. We do expect more from folks who say they live up to the Ten Commandments and the teachin's o' Holy Writ. Still, human nature is human nature. This ain't the fust time a dominee's bin shot out o' Hill Grove."

Lew grinned again, but his eyes, the next instant, saddened.

"We can't be like them big fellers!" He motioned toward his grove, which they were now leaving.

"They've got their scars, dominee. Had to fight for ev'ry inch they gained. But they kept reachin' up, reachin' up till they got head and shoulders above all t'others. Couldn't halt them fellers! Nope! Never! That's why I admire 'em. Gad! But they've got spunk in 'em! And look at the size! Cut 'em down for hen-yards. Not by a jugful!"

"A few people in the parish tell me to start a new church here—independent work. John Cummings, Hartson, Nan Thurston and the Kivellas. Perhaps if—"

"Wouldn't do no good. Place is over-churched now. Only go to pieces after a while. Ya wouldn't want to stay here forever. Them kind o' things only stir up bad blood. Nope. Go on! Get out! This place ain't got nothin' to offer a feller with gifts like ya got. Mebbe it was a good thing all this happened. Ya might a got salted and shelved right here like the last dominee. The Almighty had to send a draught o' cold air to his back in order to keep the church from freezin' stiff. Guess it did freeze, after all."

Gilbert was surprised, shocked, stirred by Lew's unusual and intense seriousness. Here was a new Lew O'Brien; one he had never dreamt of.

"Think these things all over, fore and aft, around and back, before ya make a move," Lew counselled, when they parted. He lowered his voice. A subtle, charming light trembled from his grey-mist eyes. "Flossie would love to have ya stay. But the town's slowly dyin', son. If ya were me own, I'd say—Hoof it! And—I—wish—ya—luck." And his hand shot out.

On the way home Gilbert did a heap of serious, whole-souled thinking.

The next day Lew would be astir with the stock, to do his daily chores, to run an extensive and fertile New England farm. He would trudge about the village some time, talking about potatoes and cabbage prices and the new spring planting—if he talked at all.

He would work "like a dog" morning, noon and night to keep one especially fine piece of property out of debt. What for? Had he not made money? Undeniably yes! Shouldn't he retire? No!

Lew was afraid that some other farmer, an unseeing one, might molest his unique and cherished grove of pines—the only grove of its kind for miles about.

If Lew was possessed by such vision and courage, what courage and wisdom should possess a preacher!

And yet Gilbert, nearing home, felt no increase of spiritual fervor or radiance. Some trees were pines—yes. But most were birches, oaks, elms, maples, beeches. Bare, bleak and cold, shivering in the onrushing winter winds, they stared hopelessly at life beside the frost-filled roads.

POOR MAN'S HOTEL

"Do you know that Jack Kivella's in jail?"

This choice snack of information was tossed and flung about Hill Grove by wagging tongues as vitally as torn flesh is fought for and whirled about among a snarling pack of dogs. In a morning everybody knew the obvious, unpleasant story of Jack.

Evelyn, home again, returning to the manse from the store, hurried upstairs to the study, her overcoat on, her hands piled with bundles.

"Did you know about Jack?"

"Jack who?"

Gilbert looked up from the book he was reading, teetering back in the swivel chair.

"Jack Kivella. He's in the Windham County Jail."

"Who said so?"

"It's all over town. And Nan Thurston just admitted it."

"She would know probably. What's the charge?"

"Breaking and entering."

"Where?"

"In North Woodstock. A summer home. Already been sentenced to six months in Brooklyn."

"Looks bad, doesn't it? Wonder what ever got into Jack. Had no idea he was that kind of young man. Seemed to be quite the opposite. Hear anything else?"

"That's all the town's talking about this morning. They're giving us a rest, I believe. The Kivella's are under the whips now." Evelyn's flashing blue eyes flamed with feeling, her words were edged with knives. "Who wouldn't this place tear to pieces! These little country towns thrive on offal!" Her face caught fire. "The quicker we're out of it the better. I wish we'd never set foot in it!"

"Take it easy, Evelyn. There are many fine people in Hill Grove—the Cummings family, the O'Briens, the Thurstons—"

"And more that aren't!" she whirled upon him, turning, clattering down the stairs again.

Gilbert sauntered down into the West Village.

Everywhere the conversation was about the ignorant Finn that had disgraced the town. Even Alma cried the boy down, declaring that crime and wickedness were getting worse every day. She didn't know what the world was coming to.

"I expect the Lord will burn it up one of these days!" she exploded. "Breakin' and enterin'. Dear me!" Alma shuddered. "And Ma and me livin' all alone and bad men everywhere! I lock all the doors twice now on the inside. Guess I'd better buy some more locks."

Obadiah was a bit more charitable. He said this to loudly incriminating Ean Hatt.

"Lots o' jail birds be on the outside, Ean. Some right in this diggin' might a bin hauled in fer bootleggin' applejack after dark." This fling robbed Ean of his many handfuls of arguments in one desolating blast.

Here and there were those who felt sincere pity for Jack. Strange as it first seemed to Gilbert, Mrs. Rutgers, reading the morning paper, decided on a bit of home missionary activity. Finally she argued Wally over to her frame of mind.

He must drive to the Windham County jail. She would do this bit of Christian work in the name of the Ladies' Aid Society.

Maybe she could sort of heap coals of fire on Jack's head, too, by a stroke of kindness, as the Good Book said

Saturday afternoon Jack had the new visitor—the small, diminutive Wally, red face doubly red in the scourge of the late November winds. Wally relieved himself of his cud outside the jail, wiped his chin with his expensive kerchief and hitched the horse and buggy to the single hitching post left in its place behind the jail to recall antiquity.

The county jail was a large, imposing red-brick structure that reminded Wally of a hotel, nicely situated in sightly grounds. He carried in his hands a good-sized paper bag.

Awkwardly he inquired of the warden: "Is a young chap here by name of Jack Kivella?"

"Yes, sir. Like to see him?"

"Wouldn't mind if I could."

A huge steel door was opened and shut; the visitor followed the warden through a stone hallway to another huge steel door which was opened and shut. Then along a corridor. The warden asked the visitor to remain in a severely plain steel and cement compartment or visiting room. Every time a door was disturbed, it had to be locked and unlocked. Wally shuddered.

"Wait here. I'll get Jack."

In a few minutes the warden, accompanied by the prisoner in heavy blue shirt and pants, returned.

It was an awkward, difficult moment. Glances of recognition were swiftly, anxiously passed. Both men stood and faced each other.

Wally was the first to suggest dialogue.

"Thought I'd come over and see you, Jack." He stood plank-like, holding the paper bag in his hands, his face rather more toward the cement floor than toward the prisoner's face.

The stoutly-built, muscular youth stood no less awkwardly

than the other, his face also toward the floor, his voice as stiffly formal.

"Thanks, deacon."

"Heard just yestiddy that you was in here, Jack."

"Yep, I'm in here now, deacon."

"Wife and me—and Sam—was quite upset to hear this yestiddy mornin'."

"Were you?"

"Yes, we was."

Quite an interval of time passed before conversation was resumed, Wally setting the bag on the floor, in a nearby corner, returning to the prisoner. Jack stood his ground, grimly, shyly, silently.

Finally the deacon screwed up courage.

"Was the papers right—breakin', enterin' a place?"

"Yep, they was! But I only took one old suit, a quilt to keep me warm in my shack, a few tins of food. My folks turned me out of Hill Grove. Lost a job I had in Woodstock on a farm. Tried to get work there, Hill Grove, Jewett City and lots of places.

"All I could get to live in was old, abandoned shack. North Woodstock. Picked up odd jobs now and then. At last I see I must steal or I must freeze and starve. So I steal."

Again a long, painful interlude of silence. Wally cast several sharp glances at the severely plain, cold and barren aspects of the jail interior and managed to speak again.

"Like it here?"

"Ain't so bad, deacon. Steam heat—shower bath—clean wash rooms—lots of company. Better than shack in cold snap last month. Almost froze tryin' to burn green wood. Even after I took the quilt I warn't too warm."

"You didn't tell anyone you was so bad off, Jack."

"Nope—didn't! But I tried to get work, didn't I? I went to

every farmer in county here and New London. I come to you a while back, didn't I?"

"Reckon so. But there wasn't nothin' to be done right about then, Jack."

"That's what they all said. When I was sick nobody come see me. Not one of church folks. Who give a damn?"

"Elder Swartwood will probably be up."

"He will?"

"Reckon so. Told me this mornin'."

"Wish he'd give me a hand before I come here."

Wally cleared his throat, three or four times and muttered about the beastly chill weather.

"You don't mind it then, in here, Jack?" Clearly Wally was puzzled.

"Nope. Good dinner today. Roast pork, mashed potatoes, brown gravy, bread puddin'. Damn sight better than they get in the army, my pal said. Best feed I got all fall."

"But don't you feel kind of—ashamed like?"

"Don't know, deacon. I got lots of pals. Warden seems to be regular guy. Gave me some tobacco two days ago. Tasted good. First makin's I had in a month."

Again a long lapse in conversation. The two voices had not gained in enthusiasm as the conversation continued. Still the same slow, exact matter-of-fact exchange of words.

"I don't think folks will be too hard on you, Jack. I spoke to some."

"Thanks, deacon."

Once more the dialogue lagged.

"Should a come to church, Jack. Might a strengthened you."

"Nope. Don't think so. Liked the Revvy. But they gave him a dirty deal. So I heard. Glad I didn't go."

Wally hummed and hahhed a few moments, looked out

the window, then decided to move to the corner where the paper bag reposed.

"Got a little re-membrance here. Apples. Baldwins. Keep good. Might like one sometime."

"Yep, I would. Thanks, deacon."

Wally handed over the bag. The youth uncrinkled the top and snatched a look inside.

"Pretty fair ones, ain't they?"

"Best I got. Wife picked 'em out."

"Tell her I thank her."

Once more the painful silence—only the crackling noise of the paper bag Jack was shifting. The prisoner commenced to move uneasily and Wally stepped a foot away.

"Glad you're more or less comfortable, Jack."

"Thanks. Don't worry about me none, deacon. If you see Ma or Selma, tell 'em everything's hunky-dory."

"What does that mean?"

"They'll know. And thank the Missus for the apples."

"Don't mention it."

Again shuffling of feet.

"Thanks."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

When the deacon had gone Jack made this single remark to the congratulating warden.

"Nice lookin' Baldwins, ain't they? But it's pretty late in the season for 'em now."

BONFIRE

"Purty late fer a bonfire, ain't it?"

Obadiah, chewing, hands clasped behind his back, moseyed up the driveway to the thickly smoking fire in front of the manse garage.

"Not for a bonfire of books," Gilbert responded, unloading manuscripts, papers, books into the dense, blue-curling smoke.

"Looks like ye're burnin' worth-while stuff. Jes come up from Violet's. Bet she'd like some o' them books with the purty covers." Obadiah spoke almost wistfully, flinging out a stream into the fire. The fire sizzled where the swift, brown stream met it.

"Take some if you'd like them. No good to me any more." Gilbert extended three fine-looking volumes. "Here's three new books. Sermons. Bet Violet would like them. From the great preachers of the country."

Obadiah made no move to unclasp his hands. He shuffled his feet, chewed a while in silence. Slowly he disclosed his thoughts.

"Don't figger Violet 'ud be strong fer sermons. Ain't no Sunday School kind. Never was. But's Violet's terr-ubble keen fer love stories. Any o' them kind? Might use 'em fer Christmas presents. Times ain't so fetchin' these days."

"I'm afraid I can't accommodate, Obadiah. All these are

heavy reading—religion, ethics, homiletics, hermeneutics, pastoral theology and such."

"Too bad," Obadiah mourned. "Violet, she's a terr-ubble hand fer love stories. Reads all she can lay her hands on."

"Don't take her a book, Obadiah; let her have the real thing."

"How's that?"

"Ask her to marry you. Then she won't need to read books any more."

"Get spliced to her? Why, I ain't even thought that fur ahead. Plenty time. Violet says we got a hull life-time yet to think o' gettin' spliced. Then, too—" Obadiah trained a veritable river into the fire—"I wouldn't have no place to go and visit no more. Enyhow, it's cheaper fetchin' her a book, time ta time."

Whereupon Obadiah, like a soldier, head held high, thin, long body alert and agile, gently swaying from side to side, his quiet grey eyes taking in everything, scuffed down the driveway.

"My! What a smoke!" Alma complained in stentorian tones, a bit later, to a neighbor, as she bustled up the road. Alma coughed noisily.

"Ain't it a shame one can't manufacture a fire without smoke? They're manufacturin' everythin' else these days, everythin' 'cept a balanced budget fer the country. Guess the big shots is numberin' that amongst the missin'. Bet they put Franklin D. back into the big chair. Pa did say once that the cry o' the people was the cry o' God, somethin' like that. So I s'pose it's okay. Enyhow, my W. P. A. job let me keep the old place."

Renewed coughing. Alma whirled an incriminating stare toward the smoke-mantled manse-yard.

"Mercy me! What is the Reverend burnin' today? By the

smoke I'd say he was burnin' the house down!"

Nan Thurston, far down the road, observed this pillar of cloud by day and inquired of Evelyn what was going on at the manse.

The Monday afternoon Women's Club session was over, and Evelyn had invited Nan to the house for supper and to spend the evening.

"Couldn't say. Gilbert isn't much of a hand about the place, and I cleaned out the back room Saturday. Maybe some old paint boxes and rags from the art studio in the garage. Nan, if you ever marry an artist commence married life on a baleful of rags!"

"Guess they're cheap enough," Nan frolicked.

"Cheap enough? Sometimes they're the dearest things about the house. Can't scrape one up for love or money. Almost have to set a guard in order to keep a cloth of any kind for cleaning or dusting about the place."

Early December twilight was falling leisurely, bright, long strips of orange spread hard up against deep, vivid bars of lavender-blue, the surrounding hills a dense, cold green-purple, the road apparently a stretch of greyed sepia in the midst of cold, dismal darkness. Even the sunset's orange lustre was chill. Against the lurid sunset the billowing, curling smoke that saturated house and garage by turns seemed almost a magic serpent with wings escaping from some vermillion magic box hidden in a crackling, snapping bonfire.

A tall, dusky figure loomed in silhouette beside the flames and smoke, garden-rake in hand, in old clothes and overalls, as the two young women hurried up the driveway.

"What on earth are you doing?" Evelyn demanded, her amply clothed, nervous little body whisking to the fire. Her eyes pierced the flames, glanced among the shrivelling, curling sheets of grey-white, scanned a smouldering book-cover,

flitted among thick magazine stacks in process of destruction.

She watched the many bits of fire-eaten debris that rose up from the fiercely burning mass as the end of the garden-rake stirred the fire. These smouldering, phosphorescent bits, winking like little red eyes of the dark, danced in the mild winds up into the cold limbs of a giant elm nearby, careened like magic voyageurs going to the stars, almost reminding one of the charred but living souls of books escaping the fire in the dusklight and harking back to God.

"You surely aren't cremating your elegant library!" she finally expostulated, in a tone of voice that forbode ill to dissenters. "I hope, I trust you haven't lost your senses completely!"

Gilbert, keeping silence after greeting Nan, stirred the fire again with the rake handle and shoved some smoking books deeper into the devastating flames.

Evelyn, of a sudden, swept into the house, ran upstairs and stared upon the lighted study. She felt suddenly sick, weak, dizzy. The book racks were largely empty. The desk drawers wide open, empty, yawning their emptiness. The closet door open—empty—where Gilbert kept his sermons. His favorite religious periodicals were not stacked on the floor.

"Oh, Gill! How could you do it?" she cried, choking, as she raced to him beside the fire.

Grim, stoical silence, new prodding of the fire, sparks bobbing in the wind like a suddenly released host of earth-stars.

"Your grand library, Gill! All of five hundred books! Your sermons—the sermons you worked so hard on! Your work of the past ten years! Oh, Gil, you've made an awful mistake!"

Evelyn broke down and cried. Her prim little body shook convulsively by the fire. She hid her face in a handkerchief swiftly swept from her purse.

"Who cares?"

Gilbert spoke, moving to the other side of the fire, poking his rake-handle into the charred embers.

"What do you care? You didn't give a damn when things a thousand times more vital and precious than these books were burning up inside of me—going up in smoke. What did you care? You with your Women's Club, pink teas, delicate little tete-a-tete's, new fall furs and wraps and all! That mail-order business of yours, selling cosmetics in Norwich, that was all you cared for!"

"But we need the money, Gil!"

Evelyn trembled. Never had he spoken like this before. She was now so sorry she had invited Nan for supper.

"We didn't then. The hardest week of my life, where were you? At your mother's!" His words were as sharp as lances. They cut deep.

"But I was dead tired, Gil, and not well. And mother wrote for me to come." She knew she must speak frankly, whole-heartedly, desperately. "Wasn't it my duty to go?"

"No, not that week! Anyway, I needed you and you weren't here. So another took your place, kept me from going crazy—and, anyway, this is my inning now. I'll play the game as I see fit. What good are these things to me?" He drove the rake fiercely into the dying blaze and again whirled the livid, crimson tongues heavenward. "I won't need them any more."

"Won't need them any more?" Evelyn echoed, her eyes those of a ghouls beside the livid crimson. Nan started, too paralyzed and hurt to speak.

"Won't need them any more!" Gilbert repeated, hatred, brutality, despair in his voice now cold as the night skies.

"They're all gone now, anyhow. Junk! Junk! That's the stuff I have lived for, sweat for, taken bumps and cracks for! I gave my heart and soul and life for that junk! Beautiful

thoughts, beautiful words, beautiful deeds! Hell, what did it all amount to? It mocked me, scorned me, laughed at me, awake, asleep!

"They betrayed me and what do we do to betrayers? They deceived me and what happens to liars? To hell with them! So I've burnt them in hell!"

With a sudden, frightened cry, Nan started down the driveway.

"Come back, Nan!" Evelyn pleaded. But the guest disappeared in the deepening dusk.

"See what you've done!" Evelyn yelled.

Gilbert, as one newly waking, sank weak and exhausted on a fruit-box he had used as a chair. He let go of the rake and bent his head to his hands.

"God!" he moaned. "I don't know what's happened. Something inside me has gone. A light—black out. I'm the most miserable person in the world. God, have mercy on my poor soul. I'm—lost."

Evelyn crept like a slave to his feet, reached up, took hold of one hand. He shifted his position and got his hand out of reach. She knelt and placed fingers on his thick, black hair.

"Gil, listen to me. We've got each other yet, haven't we? Can't we begin again?" Tears, love, sorrow; bitter, anguished pleading.

For an instant Gilbert fell prey to this new, beautiful attack. But—it had come—late. He only surrendered to this new, secretly craved conquest for a moment or two.

"No. We can't. God—no! I can't now! Everything is dead, black out, burnt out, like this fire will be at dawn. I can't ever believe—again."

Evelyn stood and folded warm, tear-wet hands about his neck and she pressed his head against her heart.

"Please don't go on like this, Gil. It isn't like you."

"I know it isn't!"

He jerked to his feet, freeing himself from her embrace.

"All the things I loved, that I would have died for, my dream world, the kingdom of God, it's there in the embers! Life did that. Not me! Not me!" he choked. "I loved it above everything. But life, the church, these lean, hard times, these rotten times, they've killed my soul! So I cremated the corpse! Oh, God!"

Crying, choking, with an awful oath Gilbert stooped over, picked up the rake, flung it like a hated reptile into the smouldering fire, looked at Evelyn, and started walking resolutely, desperately, angrily down the driveway into the night.

"Gil! Come back! Please come back!"

The resolute steps kept receding into the distance.

Evelyn, frightened, horrified, limped toward the back door steps. In a human countenance, one she loved above all others, she had seen the terrible, black, pitiless end of dreams. And in her ears rang his bold, merciless indictment of her lack of soul.

One strode deliberately off into the thick chill, almost friendly darkness; one went to her room, to fling herself, fully clothed upon the bed, to toss and turn, to pray and scold and shiver in a cold, desolating sweat.

When a man gets to the end of his quest for the superlative Beauty, a wife, not too sophisticated or superficial, will know it. And there will be crosses for two to bear.

THIS LAST ANCHOR

The Springfield Art Club Exhibition of oil and water color paintings and sculpture, only added one more disheartening experience to this young dreamer, one now only in oils. Not even an honorable mention. Mr. Hartson had provided conveyance to Springfield, Massachusetts, and back again to Hill Grove.

Gilbert brought his unsold creations back to the little garage studio and returned them to their several places.

Would his artistic experience prove to be only another long, discouraging, empty road? He feared to think of the long, difficult climb. Could he keep his courage good? It was some time now since he had been in a mood for whistling.

Evelyn endeavored to cheer him. But her efforts, unskillfully managed, rather inclined the other way.

"Keep your painting as a hobby," she counselled. "But go into salesmanship. Try selling. I believe you'd make a successful salesman."

"What makes you think that?"

"You meet people easily, you are never at a loss for words. You have a good personality, pleasing manners and the common people seem to take to you easily and naturally. Your pastoral experiences might serve as capital."

"I asked you never to mention that matter," he warned. "You seem possessed to thwart my attempts to forget."

"Sorry. I was simply thinking of encouraging you. You might be cut out for a salesman."

"What? An artist a salesman? Impossible! Artists as a class are the poorest salesmen in all creation!" Gilbert blasted. "Impossible!"

"Would the combination be stranger than that of artist and pastor?" she lurched.

"Of course. One portrays the visible beauty, the other the invisible."

"I am still certain I'm right. As a salesman of religion you were really a genius!" Evelyn looked up from the kitchen sink where she was draining vegetables and fixing them for dinner.

"Salesman of religion?" Gilbert echoed, catching at the interesting phrase, turning over a newspaper page.

"Sure. You were selling, promoting the invisible beauty, weren't you? You were trying to have others accept it, love it, keep it. Isn't that salesmanship?"

"Rather clever today," Gilbert owned. "My, that would have been a corking sermon theme once."

"You sold your dream world so well that you stirred Hill Grove up as it was never stirred before!"

Gilbert, greatly pleased, entertained, now gave Evelyn undivided attention, the paper unnoticed.

"If you can sell things so well, my, what a wow you'd be as a salesman of some visible commodity! Vacuum cleaners, mixing bowls, pie plates, new jar openers!"

Gilbert exploded with hilarious laughter. He arose, stepped to Evelyn, held out his hand, bowed, made believe he held something.

"Lady, I have here the very latest thing on the market. Look at it! Shiny, efficient, rust-proof, fool-proof. So simple a child can use it. So durable it will be of use to your great-

great grandchildren. So up to date that posterity will still date it ahead."

Evelyn set the steaming kettle she was holding on the kitchen range. She assumed the attitude of surprise, interest, dignity.

"And, my good sir, what can this wonderful product be?"

"The very latest and most useful commodity in all the world. Mends all family jars, fixes all church leaks, cements all worn relationships and repairs the past. Why, it even mends the soul."

"And, my good sir, pray tell me what this wonderful product might be?" Evelyn was all animation.

"Something I've carted all over the world and I've only sold ten-penny-worth. Love, my dear lady, love."

"Then why not keep it for yourself, my good sire. It is too valuable even to sell."

The little joke ended in stiff, straight formalism.

"Me—selling new jar openers!" grunted Gilbert.

"Men as smart as you have gone on the road."

"If you really believed in me you'd never had said that!" Gilbert finally judged. "I mean, giving up my art."

"I didn't mean to give it up. Don't you understand? I was simply trying to save you these hard, cruel, disillusioning experiences. I can't bear to see what they're doing to you!"

"I appreciate your interest."

After dinner Gilbert built a fire in the garage stove and proceeded to touch up two earlier paintings.

Selma knocked, about mid afternoon, and jubilantly entered.

"Knew you were home. Saw the smoke from the garage. Didn't somebody buy my clothesline painting?" she inquired at once.

"Not this time," he returned, rising from the stool, laying

down palette and brushes. "Nothing sold. Out of luck again. Guess it's about time to lock shop and forget all this painting business. I'll soon be eating into the little capital I've laid away. Oils are expensive and I can't get interested in water colors or pastels. A pauper can't afford to have expensive tastes these days!"

"Oh! I'm so glad!" The young woman beamed, standing beside him, her eyes having discovered the favorite scene among so many.

"Of what? That I failed?" Gilbert, puzzled, studied her raptured face.

"No, silly! I was so afraid someone would buy my picture!" Her eyes seemed to be points of diamonds that sank into the twin pools of his eyes.

"No such luck," Gilbert slouched.

Great, surging pain broke over her tense, serious features.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way," he consoled. "And thanks a million for your interest. Do you really think I've got talent?"

"Talent? Yes, and more. Genius. Everybody says you are a real artist. Why, have you lost faith in that, too? No, that couldn't be!"

"You don't know what those kind words mean to me."

"Kind words?" Selma questioned. "But I have always told you what I thought of your paintings. Wish I could get my own little bullet-eyes opened sometime, so I could see your things. But I'm a strange kind of kitten. Mine just don't ever get opened. Stuck, I guess."

"With what?"

"With desire."

"Desire?"

"I can't see some things because I want some other things so terribly much!"

"For instance?"

To get away. Lato's back again, getting fresh—and Jack is still in jail."

"I'll smash that Finn once and for all!" His fists clenched and his lips pursed themselves into sudden fury.

"Oh, it isn't only Lato. It's everything! Father isn't well and mother's discouraged. Don't see how they can meet the taxes next year. I've tried to find work everywhere—the mills, stores, even house work. Nobody seems to care about me—except Lato.

"I hate him! But he is the only one who seems to care whether I am alive or not!" The cream-white face, streaked now with carmine, vermillion, purple, became a compelling face, the eyes, their intensely bright lights radiating a fierce, fearless fire, pools of deep anger. Her prettily curved lips were grimaced into sneering hatefulness.

"Selma! For God's sake don't be like that! Marry Lato and he'll break your heart!" Gilbert cried, voice coming loud in a devastating blast.

"It's breaking anyway. What of it?"

A boisterous rattling and chugging in the yard. Gilbert, glancing out the window, scanned a steaming radiator and spoke one word—"Lew."

Conversation had nicely subsided when Lew scuffed into the art studio.

"Nice and warm in here," he remarked, pausing to light the corn-cob. Gilbert wondered if he would ever meet Lew at a time when the tobacco was burning merrily.

Soon he got to looking about the picture gallery, paintings of autumn woodlands, snow scenes, forest trails, mill streams, ocean breakers—on the walls, on shelves, on easels, in intriguing panorama everywhere.

"Hmml!"

Lew fastened his eye to the Horse-Fly painting. He approached it and gave it closer scrutiny.

"Hmm. So that's the painting the town made all that fuss about."

"What fuss about?" Gilbert questioned, again thrilled to vital conversation.

"Oh, the fuss a spell back. Town was afire. The dominee was paintin' naked wenches in the woods!" Lew chuckled. "She has got a bathin' suit on, ain't she? I heard she didn't have a stitch on. Didn't believe it. But plenty did!"

"Who told you?"

"Flossie, 'course."

"How did she know?"

"Old lady Rutgers was up to the house that mornin'. 'Course I can't swear that's how it came about. Flossie wouldn't say. But old lady Rutgers got the story goin' about the drunken sot!" Lew drew deeply on the pipe stem and watched the curls of smoke as they unwound from his lips.

"That was my brother!" Selma exploded. "And I have been waiting a long time to find out who's been telling all the lies about Jack and me in town. Drunken sot, naked wench, eh? We'll see! I'll tell that old busy-body where she gets off!" Selma did not speak loudly; she seldom did. But quick, devastating purpose inflamed her face and made her voice tremble.

"Oh, let the old fool alone," Lew counselled. "That's all the fun she gets out o' life, spoilin' the fun fer everybody else."

"Well she's in for it this time!" Selma warned.

When Selma had left, Lew made an observation.

"Now there's a gal's got spunk. Allus said so. If she warn't a Finn she'd go places in life, see things, have a palace."

"What's being a Finn got to do about it?" Gilbert

replied stoutly. "She is an exceptionally fine girl."

"Ah, but New England country ain't no makin' place fer Finn farmer girls. No way fer her to steam ahead. Kivella. The very sound o' the name around here is like wavin' a red flag in the face o' an ornery bull!"

"You're wrong there, Lew."

"Think so? Wall, dominee, here's the makin's fer yer pipe when ye git one. If ye hadn't been so all-fired sociable with her kind ye'd still be drawin' yer twenty-five a week. And there wouldn't be a move a foot ta hustle ye out o' the parsonage the fust o' the year. Mind this, son. I ain't no tale-bearer. But 'member what I said a while back? Wall—GO! Make yer way in the world. Son, 'member the pine."

Gilbert remained alone in the darkening art gallery long after Lew had gone. He stood by the west window and watched the thick, grey clouds, tier lining above tier, that were waiting, as if things of fate, for the slow, lingering, hesitant sun that moved on to a certain, premature twilight.

Looking at the sky, a mingled wonder of terror and beauty, joy and fear, a brisk wind rising and singing a shivering song among the rafters, he thought of a text he had once preached on: "The sun has gone down while it is yet day."

He glanced about the gallery, engulfed by the rising shadows. There was a tiny, sun-filled back-yard painting and another portrayal of a delightful, green-clad woodland stream.

Gilbert recalled Lato. He thought of Evelyn. He remembered salesmanship. He thought of aloof, disinterested churches. He vividly recalled a bonfire. He remembered Lew's honest, brutally honest advice. "GO!" He thought of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl, terribly shaken, resigning herself to a mad plunge in order to escape soul-killing

monotony.

He could no longer distinguish the outlines of the various paintings. He was only aware of a girl's wistful, worshipful eyes, so recently close to his own. He was not even hearing Evelyn's clear, clarion call to supper.

ONE THING MORE

The heavy, threatening phalanx of clouds that waited, resolutely to vanquish the too lovely winter sun of the preceeding afternoon was now, at mid-morning, wheeling into action. The clouds were flinging out their advance guards. Fitful, infrequent sallies of wet snow, half rain, half snow, were increasing their forces. The wind was growing colder and heightening effects. A fierce blizzard threatened, ten days to Christmas.

Children, overjoyed, waited expectantly. Snow now for sleds and the reindeer. Old people waited, anxious, the sudden intrusion of this new, bitter cold.

Selma thought of none of this as, mid-morning, warmly bundled with clothes, she hurried past the Hill Grove manse, and turned onto a side road, bent for the Rutger's homestead.

Alma, out again after a sick spell, was returning from the store with her mail, ploughing into the wind like a ship, all cloth flying. Alma kept winding her seedy-looking fox-fur about her neck, her pale face now the color of carrots.

"This is what I call a real blow! Need yer sea-legs on, eh? That's what Pete says. Guess he's right, though he's never bin ta sea."

Selma came abreast, not attempting to halt progress. She did not even reduce speed.

"Yes, it is threatening. Snowstorm likely. Time to expect

them."

The swiftly-moving, smoothly-proceeding body swept resolutely by, the face exposed only for an instant.

"Well! Of all things!" exclaimed Alma. "What's the world comin' to! Even the Finns is gittin' on their uppers. Heavens alive! Pretty soon won't be anybody left one can stop and gad with!"

Scolding to herself, pouting, Alma, after watching the precise, deliberate stride of the vanishing girl, flung her fur again about her neck and bent herself, stern foreward, into the storm and inched down the wind-whirled hill backward.

"Great ship, that!" Ean later said to Obadiah. "It come bustin' into me from the rear where I was gaddin' with Jake Miller. He hollers, 'Watch out!' But, boy! She rams me. Nigh fetched me over. Talk about timbers! She's pow'ful critter fer an' old spinster. Bedad, she is! Almost knocked me backbone into me shirt-front!"

" 'Ought to be lookin' where yer goin' ', she says to me. 'Serves ya right. You's men won't never give a woman a chunk o' road 'ceptin' she takes it fer herself.' My! Was she persnickery! Like a wet hen! Mad 'cause she slammed plumb into a man! I told her I didn't think she wanted a man so bad as all that—go right fer 'em and hook 'em by broad daylight. Was she upset then! Huh! Was she!"

As Alma ploughed from thenceforth, prow on, into the screaming wind, Selma approached her destination, stepped boldly to the front door and knocked.

Again the front room curtains rustled. Eyes ventured through the opening made.

"Why, good morning. Fancy having callers on such a day! But come right in!" Mrs. Rutgers, smoothing a dust-cap down over her head, around her ears, invited the caller in. "Sit down. Have the rocker by the window," Mrs. Rutgers

invited.

She seated herself imperious as a queen in the huge, overstuffed rocker by the huge black stove in the precise center of the parlor. Again the thin, frail ankles snapped the chair and its occupant back and forth. Shaking the head from side to side, an irrevocable mannerism, the eyes blazing, the face flushing, a nervous, jerky voice inquired: "And what can I do for you?"

"Just one thing, Mrs. Rutgers."

"And what?"

"That is to mind your own business!" It was a sentence of unquenchable fire.

The grey head bobbed violently, the redness of a conflagration seized upon the face; the eyes popped about like runaway, hopelessly confused stars. The excessive weight of the much-petticoated body trusted its baffling bulk suddenly to the nervous, twitching ankles.

"Wally!" the shrill voice piped in a rising crescendo. "Wally! I want you here this very instant!"

A crunching noise in the kitchen. A second small, rose-red face, with its sly, teasing black underbrush beneath the nostrils, made inquisitive sally into the doorway.

"I want you to hear this from her own lips. This is the kind of girl Reverend Chalmers painted and had designs on!"

"Why, what a monstrous lie!"

Selma, getting on her feet, advanced upon Mrs. Rutgers. Wally advanced simultaneously, but he was too slow. Selma's white hand leaped out of its glove and was swept upon Mrs. Rutgers' face. It quieted the torrential outburst with a resounding whack.

"Wally!" shrieked the woman. Selma drew back, eyes wild, face scarlet, both hands raised, coaxing combat.

"Come on!" Selma shouted. "Both of you! I'm ready!"

She struck a compelling pose, a pugilist's pose, both hands clenched, both hands circling ominously in air. "I'd love to give you both a real punch in the nose!"

There was a swift step in the kitchen, the dining room, and Sam lurched into the room.

"Sam! Get her! She hit yer Marw!" cried Wally, standing as if paralyzed, his wife crying, blubbing on his shoulder. "Give her a good one, Sam!"

"Yes! Come on!" Selma challenged. Sam advanced. Selma, fighting mad, crying, "Come on!" whirled into him, pinching, biting, kicking his shins.

"Ouch! Heh! What's up! Heh cut that out!" howled Sam, trying to imprison the swift, fierce hands that struck out blindly, smashed against his eye and drew a trickle of blood from his lower lip.

"Call the police!" screamed Mrs. Rutgers. "We will all be murdered by this lunatic!" She got behind Wally and started for the hallway. Selma divined her intent and obstructed her progress. The old lady drew back, wriggling behind Wally.

Sam stood his distance and bent down to rub one of his shins.

"What the devil's eatin' you!" he whined. Yet in his face there was more than surprise; there was wonder and no mean admixture of fear.

"Call the state barracks if you want to!" Selma challenged. "I wish you would! But wait till I get through. I'd love to tell my story in court! The slander you people have cooked up about Jack and me and everybody. I'd just love to tell in court what I can prove you've been saying. Scandal is a criminal offense in Connecticut. Go ahead! Call the barracks. But I give you fair warning that I'll dish out all the dirt.

"All the nasty, dirty lies you are heaping this place with—

lies about naked wenches, drunken sots, immoral affairs and all! Go on! I'd greet an expose! Go on! Will your faces burn up! And if I do—I'll kill your church deader than a dead pig! Go on!"

Selma's voice had risen to a point of violence—a strange phenomenon. A wild, fierce power en clothed her like some vast, imperishable halo. Strange, incomprehensible power mingled with her words. Her face was bravely, terribly white now; and the eyes glowed so fierce that they appeared to be detached from the violent face completely.

"Wally! Wally! Do—DO something!" Mrs. Rutgers screamed. "My heart, my heart's bo'therin' me again. I'll have another faintin' spell. Wally, hurry—hurry—do—do something."

The ankles seemed about to collapse, unable to bear so unfair a burden any longer. Wally, fear, wonder, anger, impotence on his face, helped his wife to the parlor couch. She sank upon it, crying, scolding, sitting upon it, face buried in her handkerchief.

"See here, young woman, get out of here!" Wally advanced toward the girl, but he did not attempt to touch her. "And don't you ever darken this threshold again!"

"Don't worry!" Selma shot back. "But I figured I owed you a call. And to think you . . . three . . . call yourselves Christians—Christians!" She made a wry face; her voice was loaded with disgust. "Do you wonder that my people are—Communists—and say—to hell with the churches!"

Sam had circled about to the front door; he held it open and the storm door also.

"If you weren't a girl!" he yelled—

"You'd be in the hospital!" she snapped, reaching the gravel walk filling with snow.

Sam slammed the storm-door shut. Selma, out on the road,

picked up a handful of dry sticks and flung them toward the house, shook a white fist again and bent furiously into the storm.

This was Saturday morning . . .

Saturday night Gilbert went for a walk.

Evelyn did not know that he slipped, first, out into the art studio. A dozen of his favorite paintings were quietly seized, among them, a girl posing on a rock, a clothesline portrayal. He met Selma at the Three Corner's Store. Ray Morton was there with the town taxi.

All night Evelyn waited for Gilbert to return.

Almost prostrated by fear and anxiety she hurried to the Kivella farm in the early morning, to face a frantic mother and to be met by a note from Selma, addressed to her parents.

Monday morning the clergyman's wife bought a train ticket to New Haven and Hill Grove was set afire by a verbal conflagration that the townsfolk were a great many weeks getting under control.

Not to this day has it burned itself out.

BOOK THREE

MAY RISE AGAIN

BEGINNING AGAIN

In six month's time a new art studio was opened in the artist's colony at Rockport, Massachusetts. It was named the "Bass Rock Studio", on North Dock. The newcomer gave his name as "G. Channing" or Gilbert Channing, obviously a play on words, the two initials kept intact.

With a small sum Gilbert had banked he had excursed, dropped out of sight, traveled incognito and later purchased a small shack or cottage by the wharves and weed-brown rocks.

The shack consisted of one large display room for the general public, filled with marine paintings—ships, surf, rocks, headlands, the ocean in every tense and mood. Two other small rooms, distinctly private, kitchen and bedroom, comprised the dwelling. The shack was nearly three times the size of overnight cabins along the state roads for tourists.

If company called, the studio, folding couch and a half dozen chairs, which, set against the walls, served as display-easels, became a parlor. The exhibition was thus adroitly turned into a colorful display of parlor paintings.

In this place of tiny, helter-skelter cottages, of various shapes and hues, clustered beside tiny, winding roads and, from all directions, fronting the smelly docks and the harbor, the unknown artist walked, talked, made a handful of friends and held long tryst with the sea.

His early fear of people gradually merged into an artist's habitual aloofness. His art proved to be his one obsession by day; and there was Selma, and in twelve month's time, the baby for the evenings.

He soon became a familiar figure in Rockport, but only about the docks and the shore-line to Bass Rocks, up to Gloucester Harbor, and back again. The village and town's people were not aware that any such person existed; a few friends—shore folks, artists, fishermen and the more venture-some tourists—only these were cognizant of an artist who had a wonderful way of blending sunlight with his seas and piling surf against Bass Rocks until one could almost hear the cannonading of the irrepressible breakers.

In old clothes he moved like a ghost at night among the fish houses and rickety wharves, among lobster traps and clumsy old fishing boats at anchor, his one increasing purpose the will to catch the subtle magic of moonlight and imprison its indescribable magic on canvas as it slid down mast heads, spread along bowsprits and haloed drab old fish-hoists. Sunsets, too, were peculiarly enchanting; and he kept terrible hours.

For a while Selma enjoyed life, a half dozen women friends, the fat, pink baby, the admiration and companionship of the enthusiastic dreamer in oils, the knowledge that she was common-law-wife, after a fashion, to a kind of genius she knew she would never meet among the clannish, hard-working farmer Finns.

But the shoreline was strange to her, the noises one hears about wharves and among creaking vessels, the wild, throaty gulls that mew dawn, noon and dusk and late into the night, clouding the horizons interminably, forever finding food and forever hungry.

"I do not like the ships," she complained one night to

Gilbert, clearing away the supper dishes. "I shall never like them."

"Why not?"

"Oh, they come and go, come and go all the time. I look out doors and always I see a sail, coming this way or going another way. Things change too much. I like things that do not change.

"Like the hills. Like the grass. Grass, it is always green. But water, it is sometimes blue, green, grey or pitch black! I do not think I shall ever like the water."

"Grass is not always green. You think it is green, but in reality—"

Selma caught up the now toddling baby, eleven months old, in eager hands, pinched its dimpled cheeks, made it squeal, then screamed in merriment, held it high over her head, kissed it, placed it back on the floor, its chubby fingers on the seat of a chair, then went on about her work mumbling: "I like the things that do not change."

One night Gilbert came upon her quietly, while she prepared herself for bed.

In the lamp's mellow radiance he found her feasting her narrow eyes on the clothesline picture she had hung above the bed. When he turned her about, to kiss her, he discovered that her eyes glittered as though the pupils floated in a pool of diamonds. She dropped her eyelids swift over their brilliances.

"What's the matter?"

He begged her to be frank with him.

"Oh, nothing! Just thinking!"

He could get nothing more out of her. She went to bed now, every night, thinking.

Selma dreaded, above all hours in a week, Sunday morning. The sound of church bells penetrated the artist's colony and their cheery reverberations entered into houses and art

studios. Up into the skyline thin, tapering white steeples jutted, strikingly outlined against brilliant morning skies of blue and white.

The monotonous, metallic hum of church bells, one in lower range than another, particularly penetrating in the clear, sea-salt air of Rockport, made Gilbert start in his chair, as if someone had hit him on the back. Selma observed. This was the signal for some vivid, invisible encounter.

Gilbert paced the narrow kitchen floor in jerky, fitful circles, stood beside the window, looked long and wishfully seaward, returned to a pencil sketch he was making, a study for some studio painting, worked feverishly, then absent-mindedly. Finally he would jam his hat on and bolt from the house.

Every Sunday morning the same kind of conflict.

One Sunday he flew into a violent mood.

"Church bells! Church bells! Everywhere they haunt me like Thompson's hound of heaven, running me down, shaking me to pieces!"

"But I thought they didn't mean anything to you any more?" Selma replied, seated, rocking, the baby in her lap, playing with her.

"They don't—except as they won't let me forget the past. Every time they ring they go through me like knives! They almost drive me crazy!"

"I bet you'd still like to be preaching," Selma suggested.

Gilbert did not answer.

But it was like this every Sunday morning.

Another Lord's Day he was reading a popular magazine when the bells began to peal. She noticed Gilbert scribbling something in pencil on the margin of the magazine page. Of a sudden, with an oath, he threw the periodical clear across the room and whirled out-doors in the driving rain bare-headed. When he had disappeared she gathered up the torn magazine,

lying on its face in the stove-corner.

Looking through it carefully she came across an article entitled: "Is Christianity Vital to the Life of Today?" On the margin of the page were certain words scribbled—"doxology, call to worship, Lord's prayer, responsive reading, notices, offering." She knew Gilbert had been making out an order of service. His sermon subject was also written in pencil—"End of Dreams." His text was scribbled in from the Old Testament, from the life of the despondent, broken Saul, King of Israel.

"God is departed from me and answereth me no more; neither by prophets or by dreams."

Another Sunday morning.

Gilbert was in Thorpe's Studio discussing modern impressionistic and futuristic painting with Ned Thorpe and Jim Burns, when elegantly dressed Ann Preston, Ned's fiancée, swept into the studio, reminded him of a luncheon engagement and started away.

"What's the rush?" Jim queried.

"Got to go to church. Organists can't be late, you know." And she had gone.

"Mighty religious girl, that one," Ned ventured, seating himself on one of the crude wooden studio chairs, canvas-back. "Works her head off to get some spiritual reaction from me. I tell her religion's only a racket like everything else. Fancy me, boy, parading up into the choir? Up on dress parade every morning wearing a black robe with a white-satin collar or something?"

Ned wove a picture with his hands, delineating his own portrait in the atmosphere—a huge, puffed-out chorister. Jim exploded with hilarity and, the next moment, rolled another cigarette. Gilbert's face grew tense—the lips twitching, the large brown eyes filling with fury.

"Do you fellows know I used to preach every Sunday, a seminary graduate, an ordained Christian minister once?" Gilbert had not seated himself. He stood in the center of the small studio floor and glared at his auditors.

Ned's grey, almost colorless eyes became peculiarly livid. His lips drew apart, then pursed themselves together.

"We didn't know. We didn't mean anything," Jim stammered. "Ned was just having his fling."

"You think I mind?" Gilbert laughed harshly. "I've got less use for the church than you have! A bunch of old fossilized sermon tasters and wizened old maids, all over fifty, waiting for the undertaker, so they can die and go to heaven while their last remaining comrades sell their churches for theatres, dance halls and Bingo parlors!" Gilbert became loud, severe, incriminating, his arms swinging, his body all action, the blue veins in his forehead standing out like whipcords.

"What is the church good for today? The W. P. A. has had to take care of the church's poor. Sermons have been reduced to little social talks! Hot-beds of slander, gossip, pretension! No live, aggressive young fellow has half a chance today! Go from forgotten rural parish to forgotten rural parish for half a century—if you're not driven out by the Board! And where have you got?

"Fifty years in ten, tiny, dwindling rural parishes preaching God to those who are only anxious to be let out on time to get the fried chicken! Going to the ladies' afternoon pink teas and acclaiming all the silly little notions they parade!

"Conference—conference—conference! Gas bills, suppers, sermons, lectures, candlelight services, external forms and superficial effects got by neat little strategies, cleverly planned!"

Gilbert paused for breath. Ned and Jim, an audience of

two, sat spellbound. Ned, mouth agape. Jim had forgotten to light his cigarette.

"Why, there's more vital religion tossing a coin into a cripple's hat than kneeling in a sacramental dusk all day! Yet what is the emphasis today? Buildings, organs, robes, church furniture, expensive windows.

"Here we are, building giant cathedrals and temples, at phenomenal sums, while the poor, undernourished commoners and their spindling women and babes waste away within the very shadows cast by those expensive edifices. The church's money going into stones and architecture when it ought to be going into bread and milk!

"Cement and mortar are more important than suffering, dying human souls! Reminds me of what Jesus said: Asking for bread and getting a stone!"

Ned whistled.

"Boy! Can you tell 'em!" Jim exclaimed.

"And how!" Ned added, glancing over at Jim's still unlit cigarette.

"Religion's a great, mammoth, hollow show! The elders love to torture and crucify the friends of Jesus as they enjoyed despoiling the Master. Any new voice is heretical. Even the emphasis on beauty is an excrescence!"

"A what?" Jim questioned.

"Well—a hateful thing!"

"You mean," Ned broke in, his eyes heaped with wonder, "You mean that the church people didn't like your sermons on the beautiful?"

"No, they did not. Said I was a pagan."

"Of course beauty was a theme of the so-called pagans. Beauty—that was the great, outstanding quest of the Greeks. But I thought all thinkers and philosophers agreed that truth, goodness and beauty comprised the great and blessed earthly

trinity. Pardon the religiosity." Ned laughed. "You see, I've got a kid brother in a seminary."

"Add love," Gilbert continued. "That is the great New Testament word, the tremendous theme of Jesus. Love. Add love and you have the four-fold gospel I tried to preach."

"Okay I'd say!" Jim judged, now reaching in his vest pocket for a match.

"Huh! I guess church came to us this morning!" Ned enthused. "The mountain came to Mohammed. Well, this was a surprise party." Ned rose and extended a hand.

"Congratulations, Brother Artist. The colony has, at length, found a worthy pastor."

"I bow to you, our most worthy pastor." Jim bent over with a theatrical air of great seriousness.

Gilbert reached over and with powerful hands straightened Jim's back and drove up his chin.

"Don't ever do that again," he warned.

EXQUISITE MOMENT

In the twilight a little table was spread. A simple, nourishing meal. Gilbert and Selma, sitting next the kitchen windows, had not lit the lamp. The dusk-soft lustre of the still crimsoning sky yielded a matchless beauty for illumination, graced the little table with an idealistic, romantic loveliness and provided for artists and young women alike an opportunity for thrift.

A casual, common sort of conversation filtered in and out of leisurely reminiscent moments between mouthfuls. Occasionally a word about Hill Grove; but more recollections of Gloucester, Magnolia, Manchester, Beverly, Rockport. Ned Thorpe had been generous with his car, and he had whirled the artist, sometimes also Selma, about the entrancing, serpentine North Shore, on the look-out for charming vistas for canvas-portrayals.

While the two conversed and lingered over the coffee cups, Gilbert noticed a boy and a dog, in the small, brown strip of yard below the North Dock Road.

A boy in the neighborhood of twelve was having the time of his life with a frolicking, gleeful Collie. In a narrow enclosure surrounded by grey-black warehouses and old, red storage buildings, lobster traps and fish hoists, a forest of masts like lifted spears in the background, bits of dark water flickering out of the dusk, the boy and dog made sudden appearance.

Selma noticed the growing disinterestedness of Gilbert in conversation. Looking from the window she observed the two playmates, a short distance away, and went back to toast, cheese and coffee.

Gilbert was now eating mechanically, absent-mindedly, his movements unconscious reflex-actions.

The boy was making brave, pleasing use of a castaway piece of board, quite long and wieldy for the Collie. Yet the boy was not discouraged in his enthusiastic efforts, or the dog.

The boy kept throwing the wood away, the dog chasing after it. It was flung along the road, into yards, into the water. The barking, leaping Collie kept appearing and disappearing, shaking himself, bounding in mad, teasing circles about the boy, vanishing like an arrow once the boy's arm had flung itself out and the wood had whirled away.

For some twenty minutes Gilbert watched, his heart there with the fun and the boy and the dog. The artistic interest of the scene pleased him. If only a decorative artist were here, to make a magazine cover of that human-interest picture!

Twilight, now a superlative display of lavender shades, the lighter and the deeper—red violet, orchid, royal purple—twilight was bathing the complete background with magic, bewitching colors. Almost now a dream picture on and out of which moved a carefree, enthusiastic boy and his gayly cavorting, play-enamored Collie.

These two deliriously happy creatures had brought a new, beautiful something to the drab, grey background of penury and futile longing that haloed the place and the hour even more than the dusk. They had brought life, youth and abounding, innocent gayety to those walls where slow, plodding, disillusioned people labored, early and late, working, giving their lives for pay.

Gilbert was thinking now of an inland Connecticut borough, an Inn gayly festooned and aglow where young couples, on a Sunday night, made merry and tried to find glorious interlude in a life that aged anxiously and ended abruptly in the mills. He was thinking of that other glamorous hour of innocent, abounding gayety, a wedding night, though he dared not mention his thoughts to Selma, or even speak them aloud to his own ears.

While Gilbert revelled with this boy and the Collie in the yard now so dark he could scarcely make out their fading outlines—they disappeared. Their careless, continuing gayeties had vanished; now only the bleak, bare, black walls everywhere again!

"They've gone," Gilbert was thinking. "So quickly gone. I wonder where? What a delightful time they were having! Who were they? I suppose they live here somewhere. I wonder if they play here every night. Strange, if they do. Why haven't I noticed them before? I always have supper here. Will they ever come again? I wonder. Will they ever play, joyously and exquisitely, like that again, and glorify the darkened yard?"

This last question troubled him, worried, oppressed him.

Perhaps—to all eternity—the boy and his dog would not entertain him again. They might never happen along again—to lift burdens, to inspire casual onlookers. Never again.

"That's like life," Gilbert was thinking. "No pure and inspiring hour lasts! The hours that re-create us may be gone, any moment, from our hearts and lives forever. Never again will the boy and the Collie play together here like that, in an August twilight. It will never yield its beauty and ecstasy again!"

"For heaven's sake, Gilbert, snap out of it!"

Selma's clear-out, urgent voice shattered everything. The

walls of his dreams crumbled. Gilbert was whirled from one world back, shockingly, to another. "My! You look like you'd lost your last friend. What is the matter?"

"Nothing much."

"Another one of your far-off moments, I guess. You know, Gilbert, you're the strangest person I ever knew."

"To you probably I am."

"I'm not finding fault," Selma added hastily, her cream-white, soft features glowing with wistful interest. "But, honest, I never thought there was anyone in all the world quite like you. Somehow that boy and the dog has got you. I can't understand, but they did, somehow, didn't they?"

"Yes, they did," he owned, rising from the table, the half-eaten cheese on his plate.

"I've never known anyone at all like you."

"You only knew Finns!"

"Is that—just—kind, Gilbert?" Selma, too, had risen from the table, beginning to pile the dishes.

"Well, maybe not—quite. But you know what I mean. All you know are hard-working farmers, men who build hen coops, plough land, make hay while the sun shines, get up early, drudge all day, go to bed early."

"Is that any disgrace?" Selma interrupted. "I thought you believed in the gospel of work?"

"I do. Sometimes I think it's the one gospel that I still whole-heartedly accept. I used to notice the Finns in Hill Grove. First thing they bought land, then they would build a tiny square building like a hen coop. I thought that they would start in with a few chickens in there. No! The family moved into the building that looked like a hen coop.

"Soon a long, well-constructed, fine-looking building, five times as good, ten times as large, was built near the shack. Hens were given the palatial building, the family lived in the

draughty shack!"

"Their living comes first, Gilbert. Hens are their living. If the farmer does well, after a few years, he will build a bigger, better dwelling for the family." Selma ventured information briskly while transplanting dishes from the small kitchen table to the sink.

"They are the people you know," he went on. "They have no time for wistful dreaming, to bother to rhapsodize about a boy and his dog, to be swayed, overwhelmed, laid desolate by such silly, foolish things that tear a fellow all to pieces over nothing at all! But it was my bad luck to have an artist's soul and an insatiable craving after incredible, impossible beauty!"

"Bad luck?" Selma interjected, her very tone of voice shouting surprise. "Bad luck?" she repeated.

"Yes, bad luck!" His voice grew louder, full of passionate fervor. He could never keep that sudden, overmastering strength out of his voice when thoroughly aroused, try as he might.

Selma stood at the sink, forgetting her journey back to the little table, thrilled, awe-struck.

"Your Finn farmers are lucky, working, eating, raising children, getting old in the sun and wind, dying, unaware of dream worlds!"

"Then you think they never dream?" This one last query she ventured.

"Maybe they do—to a certain extent. But what beauty do they see in summer fields? They plow them up for cabbages and sprouts. And do they try to build an ideal social order and teach people the fine art of living together? Do they give everything they have to the building of the Kingdom of God only to be criticized out of the church and hounded out of its ministry?"

"Your people work and they work hard; but what do they know about mental and spiritual anguish? They do get tired physically tilling their fields, chopping cord wood, raising chickens, marketing eggs, trucking produce to market, granted!

"But what about some of us, who consecrate to the church the very best we have to offer, accept small salaries, get calls to little, forgotten churches, make all manner of sacrifices, our only reward the joy we receive when we see a better social order developing in the church and in the community.

"Then somebody with a bigger bank account than somebody else goes on a religious spree, and pitches into everything and everybody, makes money talk and pulls a thousand wires! God is forgotten, charity is cancelled, good will is thrown out and Rutgers, Purdy, Swartwood go on the loose and there's hell to pay!

"Does your kind know what it is to give everything—soul, mind, body—to the creation of a Christian Social Order only to have some old blunderbus knock it into a cocked hat? Perhaps the old fool has sincere intentions, but the road to a hot spot is paved with them, so I'm told.

"Your people work hard in their fields all day long and sleep soundly all night, physically tired.

"But what do we do? We pitch and toss all night bearing the burdens of the parish, learning to love people and then being driven out, setting up our homes only to lose them, finding a joy only to lose it; and we go from church to church, each time a little poorer than before.

"Do you know what it is to give all that is in you, only to have it flung back into your own face? And when these things are the things of God, what then? Do you know what it is to offer the world the glorious Plan of God only to have the world damn you for your troubles? Do you know what it is to get to the place where you don't dare hold to ideals any

more, because they cost too much?

"Maybe some of our church leaders think that going on wild little religious sprees don't amount to much; but when they knock Christianity out of our young ministers, is that immaterial? Maybe an annual meeting is only worth a paragraph in a newspaper. And maybe it sends somebody's soul to hell!"

Struggling, panting for breath, Gilbert swayed from side to side like an exhausted, trembling animal tracked down by killers. His eyes fastened upon Selma. They loomed with pain, shame, despair. He sank dismally into a chair.

It was a long time that night before Selma had courage to light the lamp.

BRIEF RESPIRE

Some two hours later Selma got courage to light the lamp. Gilbert left the shack.

Into the dark, windy night he ventured, a touch of autumn in the late summer air. He stopped to chin a few minutes with Ned Thorpe in the studio, a sort of club for artists in the North Dock district. Jim was there, Larry and others. Unquieted, Gilbert left the group of ardent friends for the wind-whirled darkness.

Somehow the lonely night had more healing in its rough wings than the lively conversation of friends.

Farther up the road he passed a fisherman in oilskins.

"Dirty night!" the fisherman greeted. "Reckon there's a stiff blow makin' up outside harbor. Reckon it'll hit here afore mornin'."

Words were exchanged and Gilbert plunged on again.

Bare-headed he walked feverishly by the wharves, along the roads, beside the curiously assorted vessels. The strong, cool winds beating upon his forehead, brushing his hair back, the feel of rain sometimes upon his eyes—had a wild, sweet, comforting effect.

These unharnessed, unconquerable winds, whirled out of the darkness, seemed to whisper a hoarse, vital kinship. The waters splashing along shore beneath the grimy piers, swishing along the sides of guinea-boats and rocking the

dories; frail, sudden touches of white gleaming farther off in harbor; the black, stormy mood—all this suited him, knew him, yielded a strange, vivid sense of understanding and companionship.

He still continued his resolute, lonely journeying—until he came to a dark, cluttered corner in the southwest portion of town.

Thin, intriguingly haunting bits of tone-color intruded into the threatening night and clear-cut, slender notes of melody danced gayly down into the darkness and into Gilbert's soul from somewhere.

He stopped.

Where was the marvellous music coming from? Only the noise of piano music. But in the wind whipped darkness, to the accompaniment of soughing waves along the craft-cluttered shore, the music carried ethereal, celestial freight.

Where was the music coming from? Industrious scrutiny and search rewarded him.

Across the road there was a second-story window open a little ways, a yellow radiance around it. Somebody lived there, up over a blacksmith's shop or some other kind of black, sooty shop. The yellow radiance lent a smile of cheer to the pitch-black night.

What was the music saying?

He didn't know the musical selection. Perhaps some popular song of the day. But it bequeathed a certain, touching friendliness to the night that outmatched the wind and the waves. In the dimly-lit darkness Gilbert listened appreciatively, his heart gathering each simple, friendly note as the pianist released them from some battered old instrument likely; and he lovingly gathered the pleasant little silver notes, every one, into his lonely, anxious heart.

Who was the musician?

He pictured some young woman at the keyboard, her prettily-waved hair aureoled by the tender lamplight; her slender, nicely contoured neck beautifully painted into saffron splendor by the mild illumination of the lamp. He fancied her entire profile—a most pleasing one, the lithe, graceful body swaying to the rhythmic beat of the music, the tapering fingers on the keys, one foot on the pedal, the back curved like a drawn bow, the face gently poised toward the keys.

He then fancied the wistful, longing expression on her face as she created moments of beauty while the frightening clouds summoned thunder overhead.

Gilbert walked back and forth to keep warm, a stuffiness in his nostrils, a roughness in his throat. Could he have caught cold already, venturing bare-headed into this strident night?

He moved across the road directly beneath the window, so as to be nearer the music, to keep moving; then he turned back across the road. Perhaps distance would yield a vaster magic.

Automobile headlamps threw a flood of light down the crooked, winding road. Gilbert walked a ways, so that the occupants in the car might not think him to be an eavesdropper or meddlesome peeper. When the car passed he returned to the place of music.

He knew the selection now being played. Had been a special favorite. Eagerly he seized at the pretty little things that now seemed to be tiny feathered birds that flew out of the genial illumination, from this tender, near heaven out and down into his heart.

In the stormy darkness he welcomed them into his hungry, famished soul—each one. His mind was now fashioning the words while the music played the simple, wistful melody.

"Marcheta, Marcheta, I still hear you calling me back to your arms once again."

Who was playing the music? Suddenly a vivid, cruel image loomed, tall, boundless, desolating out of the invisible. Who was singing that song to him? He was sure he heard a familiar, thrilling voice—a woman's.

"Come back, come back, dear,
With you here, Marcheta
Life once more joyful will be."

There was only the feel of rain in the air, yet some sort of rain was drenching a listener's face now, running helter-skelter down it, disfiguring it, a hot, burning rain that flooded the eyes, salted the twitching lips and dropped from the fever-ridden chin into the darkness. That was Evelyn's piece.

Down the now ghoul-driven road Gilbert swept, hurried, and broke into a run, the words, like white-hot rivets, fastening upon consciousness and leaving a trail of flame—

"I want you Marcheta
I need you Marcheta
I do"

Not readily did Gilbert return home. He sought a measure of new composure first, then turned homeward. There was a light in the kitchen. Softly he slipped into the bedroom.

Two voices were intermingled.

"That you, Gilbert?"

"Yes."

He had noticed that Selma was rocking the baby to sleep, or trying to, in the bedroom rocker she had moved into the kitchen.

While preparing for bed Gilbert heard the baby crying.

What was wrong with Lyris tonight? Wasn't she feeling good, either? Was she, too, lonely and frightened? Or just teething?

Gilbert heard Selma petting the baby, scolding her,

sympathizing with her. He heard the monotonous squeaking of the old rocker in the kitchen.

Selma was singing softly a Sunday school song, a child's song. The singing was so low as to be almost a humming.

"Away in a manger
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down his sweet head
The stars in the sky
Looked down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep in the hay."

Yes, Selma was only a girl mother; yet her whole world seemed to be centering in Lyris. She sang moodily, gently. Suddenly Gilbert realized he had never heard superior notes of pure, lyric sweetness.

An impulse to go to her and confess his thoughts was swiftly, violently checked. No. It was quite enough to listen.

His head did not ache so savagely. Gilbert became conscious of new music mingling with the creaking of the bedroom rocker, new music in the snapping of the fire in the kitchen stove, new music in winds that fussed with the blinds.

More and more Gilbert succumbed to the unexpected charm of this soft, timeless beauty. For the moment he would have traded places gladly with the infant in Selma's arms.

Gilbert thought of his mother's home, his mother's old chair, the creaking of its rockers as she rocked away the midnight hours when he had been ill.

Selma was still singing softly.

Or had she gone into another room—into the parlor?

The song came now from far away. The pillow under Gilbert's head became soft as wool and the music merged with

the great, elemental vasts; it joined far off somewhere the symphony of the spheres.

Lyriss' little voice still cried out fitfully.

But the bedroom was clothed with a deep, profound peace.

Selma had sung and rocked a disconsolate man—to sleep.

STREET MEETING

Gilbert had been enjoying a Saturday night shopping expedition in Gloucester. He would take a late bus back to Rockport. Arms laden with bundles he wormed his way in and out among the throngs of pedestrians that every Saturday night obstruct progress and impede traffic in the narrow, congested streets of Gloucester.

Gilbert, looking for a certain stationery store, proceeding up the main street, became aware of music. A cornet, trombone, tambourine and drum. Voices were mingled with instruments. Turning a corner he almost collided with a Salvation Army street meeting.

Blue uniforms with bright vermillion-red trimming, martial-appearing caps and picturesque bonnets with wide brims, tastefully curved about uncut hair; a circle made on one street corner; the officers and volunteers playing lustily, making only a modest attack on the passing throngs, for only a few tarried. Automobile and street noises all but drowned out, at times, the ambitious performers. Gilbert realized all this in a brief glance and impression.

He did not know the words or the music. Nevertheless it sounded good and he approached the valiant little circle, fringed in by standees—men, women, children. Electric lights provided illumination for the musicians who were playing and singing from small, narrow song books—words without music

for the Army. The musicians, however, knew the various popular tunes by heart.

He gave attention to words the singers were voicing so lustily.

Keep sweet, keep sweet
This is the only way;
This is the way to win the day;
If you just keep sweet.

He glanced about the circle.

Most of these people were fifty and over, inclined to be portly. Two or three younger, two girls of high school age, rather grey, sallow-looking creatures, a boy of twelve perhaps.

They were all poor, working people. The man who whanged on the drum whanged away like a blacksmith on an anvil. The tall, spare cornetist was slightly under fifty probably, with an iron-grey moustache; the trombonist was all of forty. Some of his tones were none too good.

One stout, buxom woman sang lustily and her face shone in the light of the arc-lamp far brighter than that illumination.

The captain was a small, wiry man with a face lined and deeply fissured, who sang the best he could, his voice harsh and rather used up.

To the incessant unmusical tramp of crowds, to the ragged accompaniment of strident auto horns the men and women and the two anemic-looking girls of high school age sang.

The stout, beaming woman, probably the captain's wife, who knocked a tambourine against the large knuckles of her other hand, her face a glorious thing to see, intrigued Gilbert's fancy and riveted his eyes.

She seemed so happy. She was thoroughly enjoying the hour, the music, the words, the crowds. Never before had he witnessed such enthusiastic joy on a human countenance in a hard-working religious circle. Her great, full-orbed rapture fascinated him. He could not take his eyes from her face.

He thought of Voltaire and the French sceptic's sojourn in England among certain, sincere Quakers, far from the superficial, self-centered French priests. He recalled Voltaire's praise for those simple, brotherly people. Voltaire might have embraced Christianity if he could have been exposed to their marvelous contagion a little longer.

People pushed and shoved by Gilbert. Children jostled about the drummer. Their eyes, filled with wonder, joy and surprise, watched him pounding the big brass drum. Now and then a drunken fellow made some unnecessary disturbance staggering by.

There was one now on the other side of the ring, talking loudly.

"Go on! Sing some more!" a loud, drawling voice hic-coughed. "Go on! Keep singin'! That's what the country needs—more singin'. Makes us forget our troubles and miseries. Go on! Sing some more!"

"Brother, you need God."

The buxom woman with the beautiful face approached the man. Gilbert wormed his way over in their direction.

"I need—what? God? Who says so?" the man jerked loudly, insolently. "How—how'd you know what I need?"

"The Good Book tells you what you need. Oh, brother, I'm so sorry!" The large woman had grasped one of the man's violently gesticulating hands in her own. Her face looked in pity, love and tenderness into the moist, bleary eyes of the medium-sized man of the middle years, who stared strangely at the woman.

"Brother?" he echoed. "Who said I was your brother? I ain't nobody's brother. Ain't got nobody—wife, young one, friend."

"You are our brother," the woman insisted.

"How'd you know that?"

"The Good Book says so." The woman held up to the man's shifty vision a little black New Testament.

"Then—you're my sister?" The man staggered. The captain and cornetist got hold of him, steadied him.

"Your sister in Christ!" the woman answered radiantly.

"You—you'd be my sister?" the man questioned, his head falling over. With effort the man lifted it again.

"Certainly, my brother. We are brother and sister in the eyes of God. That's why you ought to be different."

"Be diff-rent? How can I be diff-rent?"

"God can make you different. The love and strength of our Lord Jesus Christ can you make different."

"How can he?"

"That's the marvel of His grace, brother."

"It made a new man out of me!" the cornet player interposed with enthusiasm. "It took me right from the gutter!"

"Did you have a good mother?" the woman questioned kindly, her eyes searching the man's flushed, bloated face.

"Mother? Did I have a good mother? Lady, back on the plains I had a good, prayin' mother, as good a mother as any man ever had. God rest her soul." The man's voice seemed clearer.

"How grieved she would be tonight, brother, to find you here like this."

The man lowered his eyes and seemed confused. Instantly the solicitous woman began to sing.

It was a clear, lyric, sweet voice. Sounding alone, rid of the band's racket, it was a beautiful thing to hear, rising up over the bedlam and confusion of the street like a single, hauntingly beautiful angel's song. The voice sounded fresh and eager as a young girl's. Quietness, a strange almost incredible quietness, descended upon the ring of workers. Even the people standing by were aware of it.

"I never shall forget the day
I heard my darling mother say,
'You're leaving now my tender care;
Remember, child, your mother's prayer."

Shoppers hurrying along the jostled streets either stopped or retarded progress. Moisture gathered on eyes within the inner circle. The words, touchingly expressed in a soulful, radiant manner, on a simple, tender arc of song, ventured into the night's darkness and confusion and vanquished it.

"O Mother, when I think of thee
'Tis but a step to Calvary;
Thy gentle hand is on my brow,
'Tis leading me to Jesus now."

"Oh God! God! God!"

The drunken fellow fell to his knees on the cobblestones crying, groaning, his body shaking as in a desolating blast.

"Pray for me!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

The woman sank to her knees beside the man, still singing; others knelt about the stricken, sobbing man. Arms were flung about his shoulder by captain and cornetist "in a friendly sort of way." Song was finished. The captain prayed to God to be merciful to this man, a sinner.

Gilbert slowly laid his bundles on the sidewalk and advanced to the circle of kneeling people. He spoke softly to the kneeling captain when his prayer was concluded.

"I'd like to say a few words," he owned. "I'm an ordained preacher."

"Why go right ahead, brother. Use your liberty."

Gilbert stepped into the center of the Army's ring and, like a conqueror, faced the enclosing walls of curious, moist or cynical eyes.

"Ladies and gentlemen, friends; it is a glorious sight these days to see a man give his heart to God, break with the old

life and with his dead mother's prayer in mind rise to a new and radiant Christian experience!"

"Amen! Hear it! That's so!" Exclamations from the Army workers.

"This is real religion. This kind of Christianity gets down into the heaped misery of human life and heals it. Friends, I have been an ordained pastor of the Church, but this is the first, vital heroic piece of Christian work I have witnessed in six years!"

"God have pity!" exclaimed the captain. "Help us, Lord!" the woman with the raptured face prayed, still beside the sobbing man.

"Friends, Jesus of Nazareth had the true pattern of life. The song we sing, 'To Be Like Jesus' has great truth in it. What a world this world would be if we all tried ardently to be like Jesus of Nazareth! Kind, good, virtuous, honest, affectionate. Where would our troubles go? How quick war would cease and damnable, false, illicit traffic like dope and white-slave traffic and gambling!"

"Bless God! Hallelujah! That's so!" Warm, invigorating support from the uniformed folks.

"Here's the end of class domination, special privilege, social injustice. The beautiful attitudes of Jesus commonly called the Beatitudes, they constitute true religion. Blessed are the pure in heart, the meek, the peacemakers, the lovers of righteousness, the humble of spirit. This is the pure, simple religion of Jesus which the church has lost in its momentous trifles of organization, religious-education-scaffoldings, worship minutiae and long, external campaigns."

"Hear it! Hear it!" thundered the Salvation Army captain, rising to his feet, his face aglow.

"Religion is simple, beautiful Christian living—the helping hand, the hour of prayer, the pure, radiant spirit of Jesus of

Nazareth. I have found it all here tonight. Oh, God, that I had found this thing before! But— but—"

The woman, kneeling, turned around, swayed by this new, powerful, unexpected burst of oratory and passion. She shuddered and the light went out of her eyes.

The speaker's face filled with pain, suffering, horror. The voice trembled, staggered.

"God! God! And me preaching to you!" The eyes went wild, the voice failed. Deep, awful, abysmal pain impaled a soul on some stern, vast, invisible gibbet.

"Brother! Brother!" the buxom woman cried, sensing a soul's hidden, tremendous need, sensing, instinctively, a looming, bitter tragedy. She started towards him, her face tender, sweet, compassionate as a mother's.

With a wild, terrifying cry the flaming young preacher bolted across the circle, ploughed through the awe-struck, dense enclosing wall of forms and faces and, forgetting the neatly piled bundles in a gutter, piled against the high curbstone, he disappeared into the traffic-thronged, newly boisterous and deafening night.

RESTLESS SEA

Ned, Jim and Gilbert were painting the stern, high-piled Magnolia palisades, near the "Reef of Norman's Woe," celebrated by the memorable "Wreck of the Hesperus".

The three men had taken strategic positions on the huge, unrelenting palisades. Their eager hands and brushes moved incessantly back and forth, in tryst with the sea, as three of beauty's worshippers endeavored to catch an immortal lustre and imprison it on a few small feet of stretched canvas.

It is difficult to paint marines.

The tide is coming in and going out incessantly; ledges are appearing and disappearing; focal points are intruding or vanishing. Sunshine and cloud are playing havoc with the spectrum of colors on the ocean. Waves are in interrupted ebb and flow. Surf and foam are never still. Their swift, sudden, elusive movements are not understood or caught by an artist's eye in a few sittings, however enthusiastic or interested they are!

A green pool among rock ledges, alive with brilliant reflections, is, the next instant, a roaring, seething, churning mass of thick, salty, creamy white. Then the churned white vanishes, at once, completely. It has not evaporated; it has not moved on. It has—vanished.

The green pool is streaked with the yellow of a thinner sea, the blinding gems of the sun flung into it by an unwearied bene-

factor. Dark green rushes into the shadows of the headlands. For a tense, baffling moment the green pool is thrillingly restored. The next moment it is vividly obliterated by a thundering, relentless deluge of the cream-soft white.

One can fairly taste the salt as one communes thus intimately and rapturously with wild, vast, unconquerable things. Health, strength, ecstasy, power, romance, daring, fear—everything makes invasion of the human spirit where artists hold constant, soulful communion with imperishable, unforgettable beauty.

"Go to the sea, thou dullard!" one might challenge those plagued with ennui, those who find no variety or absorbing interest in life. The fisherman falls prey to its ageless, compelling glamour; the artist is enslaved by its utter, devastating witchery. They have this in common—love of the sea.

Sails of fishing smacks crept noiselessly into perspective, their tufts of white jutting up into a cerulean-blue horizon streaked with pale, lavender mist, and as unobtrusively disappeared again.

Winds rose and fell. The sun ducked headlong into gayly cavorting clouds of saffron-mist and leaped gleefully out again, smiling to watch the lovely things whirled away so helplessly by off-shore winds.

"How's she coming, Jim?" Ned called from one rock to his friend on another.

"Fair. The sea is hard to get today. The mingling of cloud and sun is particularly tricky. Is the sea out there by the reef a deep chrome-green or a Prussian blue?"

"It's all according to whether the clouds cover the sun or not."

"Right. I haven't quite decided whether I prefer the sunlight or the shadow effect."

"How about you?"

"Same boat."

"And you, Gilbert?"

No reply.

"Heh! Down there!"

Ned turned about. The artist's position was abandoned, the half-finished painting pressed hard up against the rocks, jammed in between them, out of the wind's reach.

"Where the dickens!"

"Search me!" Jim answered, his eyes whirling about. "Queer gink. Best painter on North Dock. Comes out to paint and winds up by roaming all over the place!"

"Something's eating him. Wish I knew."

"So do I. But he's tighter than a clam."

Gilbert had ventured off alone, to the deep, hazardous Rafe's Chasm, where more than one had plunged to certain death in the fierce, overwhelming vortex of thunder-waters.

This spot had a subtle, occult fascination for him.

Ned had told him the story of one young girl, disappointed in love, who had flung her young, beautiful body into the tide-whirled, maddening flood.

He enjoyed watching the demonstration of awful, frightening, futile power; the sudden, wildly fierce onslaught of the mountainous seas that smashed and splintered all their white-tipped lances on these uprearing, unyielding walls.

Never the power of the wind-whirled billows would win; yet ever the sea would try.

He tried to imagine a slender, lovely body dropping like an arrow into that mad, vicious maelstrom, the dress red-taffeta or gingham blue or a Persian silk, an instantaneous blot of new, rich color on the whirlpool, then sucked down and swept fiercely away by the chasm-waters, as if resenting the unwanted intrusion of this new, flesh-clothed beauty into its wild, ageless wonder.

So vivid was his artistic imagination that he could fairly see the new, white horror on her face, the wild, pitiful clutching motion of her helpless, sinking fingers. He fancied he heard her small, frantic cries, those of a sweet girl's last accents, mingling with the sea's masterful undertones and drowning, choking in the overmastering crescendo of drumming winds and waves.

Enough of this sort of thing, Gilbert would look along the slanting, grim-visaged backs of these tremendous saurians of the shore, reminding him of primeval monsters cooled after fires and hardened into gigantic shapes forever close by the eternal waters.

He would look toward the Manchester and Beverly shore-lines and then in the opposite direction toward the low, serpentine back of rock that made brave intrusion into the murderous seas of East Gloucester, on which stood the commemorated lighthouse.

He noticed the little cottages along the shore on one side of the Magnolia rocks, the lordly manors on the other. People, rich and poor alike, built houses toward the sea and revelled, like him, in its wild, futile fury.

They, too, understood its complete, almost human passion, its frequent, superhuman bursts of power; later its drab, hapless defeat, sinking back from all vantage points taken, creeping moodily, as in tears, back into the aching bosom of the deep

When Gilbert returned to the artist's tryst they were circling about nervously, their paintings finished, their painting kits in order, their brushes cleaned, ready to go.

"Next time we'll leave you home!" Ned snapped, starting on up the rocky ascent toward a twining path that led into the brush, the shore-pines and the home road, where the car was parked.

"Some artist you are!" Jim scolded, puffing his cigarette. "Wasting a perfectly good afternoon!"

"I got another picture," Gilbert jerked, picking up his things and following his disappearing comrades.

After supper Selma questioned Gilbert about the unfinished painting. How had that happened?

"Didn't feel in the right mood today," he told her, impatiently.

"You artists are moody creatures. Honest, Gilbert, I don't know what's coming over you. You don't act like yourself lately. What on earth is the matter?"

She came over to him where he sat by the window studying the last lingering blush of twilight. She slid into his arms, onto his lap.

"Lonely."

That was his one word, shoving Selma from her position, getting up, going out the back door, clattering down the back steps to the rock-bound, kelp-strewn shoreline.

SEA DRIFT

"Is the preacher feller in?"

Answering the summons to the front door Selma stared upon a cumbrous, astonishingly unpleasant bulk. The woman must be all of two hundred and seventy-five pounds, huge in build, in most unmanageable outline.

The figure had no certain shape. The flesh, the fat slid, arched, rolled, reared, layer on layer. It was most hopelessly arranged. Enormous neck reminding one of a hippo's, the head too small for the neck, sticking on it as though some indifferent god's weak after-thought to a too-well-done creation.

Selma saw at once the excessive, slipping, sliding flesh that puffed out at the neck, breast, waist and she was sure rolled down the huge legs to the enormous feet.

"Is the preacher feller in?"

The voice, peculiarly unmusical and harsh, rasping, was ludicrously out of proportion to the body, as the head. It was a thin, squeaky voice and the woman spoke in little, arduous jerks, as if the breath had hard work to get in and out among words.

"You mean—Mr. Channing?"

"I s'pose so. Don't know his last name. But, enyhow, I mean the preacher feller what lives here."

Selma ached to inquire of this blunt, gruff creature how she happened to know that the artist had been a preacher. But

wisdom forbade that inquiry. She only scanned the small, grey, roving eyes, a washed-out grey, almost void of either color or expression.

"Is it something important?"

The huge bulk shifted weight and the sloppy outlines fairly bulged through the dress that drew hard up against one bent knee as the leg moved up another step.

Did this mammoth creature, stranger, expect, by any chance, to come into the house?

Selma felt a growing disgust for this coarse, bold creature, scraggly brown hair sticking out from beneath a frayed green cap, lint on the thin overcoat's shoulder. What? A coat on such a mild day?

"Is it something important?"

"Not perzactly, lady. I just figgered I'd kind o' like to say hello to the preacher feller what lives here."

"You know him, then?"

"Know him? 'Course I do. Why, lady, I've known all them painter fellers the last thirty years. An' they all know me, too. One dock t'other. You're a newcomer, lady, and don't know much yet. But w'en you gets a mite older in these parts you're goin' to hear a heap sight about Mam Queenie o' the docks. Yep, lady, a damn sight you'll hear." The thin, peaked voice that seemed ready to collapse through lack of power or support any moment, nevertheless held on bravely to its frail, annoying thread and slid resolutely along it.

The voice, almost a tight-rope walker, a thin, frail performer, coming out of this ponderous bulk!

Selma sensed intuitively that she conversed with an unscrupulous and dangerous woman.

"If you've only come to talk, pardon me, but I am very busy, the baby's washing." She hastily excused herself.

"Just tell the preacher-feller that Queenie called to say

good-mornin'."

Without replying the front door was adroitly shut.

Selma, newly alarmed, wasted no time brooding over this mystery. When Gilbert returned to the house she announced that he had had a most unusual caller.

"Who was he?"

"It wasn't a he."

"Well, this is interesting."

Of a sudden Gilbert's face went a deathly white, then pulsed with a tremendous tide of renewed life. His eyes and lips his very manner gave him away. Selma knew the one overwhelming thought that staggered his mind and soul.

"No," Selma replied instantly, anxious to end the tyranny of suspense. "No, it wasn't anyone from Hill Grove. The woman called herself Queenie."

"Oh, that thing!" He laughed, a short, hollow laugh, swiftly apparent, swiftly lost.

"Of all the tough looking females she takes the cake! Perfect stranger. Acted like she expected to be asked in—Monday morning. And me with a big baby washing! And nerve!"

"Huh, don't mind her. She's a fixture here in Rockport, in the colony, along the shore. Take her as a matter of course, necessary evil perhaps, but—"

"An old rake, I'd say, if I ever saw one!" Selma whisked about the kitchen with sharp, deliberate movements. "Never thought you'd be on speaking terms with that kind."

"Oh, just met her last week in Jim's studio. Came in. She pokes about everywhere, they say. Harmless old thing."

"Think so?"

Selma, busied with her work, continued a relentless industry and failed to look up. But the words came hotly over, spoken as though she looked sharp into his face, into his heart.

"For heaven's sake, Selma, you don't think I'd care for an old wench like that, do you?" His words were impatient, irritable. "She came into Jim's place. Had a couple of beers with the boys, got a little noisy and went out. Perhaps a public nuisance, but a harmless old thing. Passè, long ago!"

Again that carefully articulated question in cool, pertinent manner. "Think so?"

"The boys have sport with her, like to get her going, see her put on an act. And can she! Talk about your amateur theatricals! Load her with a few beers, talk about the men—and—can she talk! Say, she's a riot!"

"Please, Gilbert, I'm not . . . interested . . . in . . . the . . . least . . ."

Slow, almost colorless, definite, final words from Selma.

She swept into the bedroom to attend to the violently crying baby.

Later, when Gilbert dared mention the subject again, Selma looked him square in the eye, scorn crept along both lips and she exclaimed: "God! Gilbert! How you have changed!"

B E C A L M E D

Dusk was quietly yielding to earth its daily hour of breath-taking beauty.

Gilbert stood by one of the narrow kitchen windows overlooking the small harbor cluttered with its thousand crafts. No breath of wind was stirring or pushing aside the crimson and gold curtains of the dusk. The sails of fishing boats hung like whited ghouls against the gently approaching dark. Little friendly lights made fond invasion of the darkness in tiny scattered or commingled shore-cottages and wharf buildings everywhere..

Imperceptibly the sun's golden bowl, on fire with an indescribable majesty, exhaled a vivid, almost colorless glow, perhaps resembling some magic, subtle incense that was creating of the sky an astonishingly lovely sanctuary fit for any God to worship in; and, for this brief, elusive moment disclosing it to the few scattered, devout eyes on the cosmos that had time to look up and worship, their hearts possessed and laid desolate by a perfect thing already going. The gold-blazoned walls were swiftly crumbling in the clutch of subtle, invincible shadows.

Thinking of other things than the mast-littered harbor and fishermen thronging the irregular shore-line, Gilbert reached into the chair by his hands and gathered into his fingers a current magazine he had been furtively reading. The magazine

was lying face open at the page that had thrilled him to give special attention to this tender, bewitching hour.

He read again in the feeble carmine illumination, holding the magazine to the fading glow, the lines that had oppressed, delighted, stirred, hurt him. His eyes moved effortlessly from the title: "April Dusk" to the tiny poem centered tastefully in the magazine page.

In the peace of an April dusk
When the day's gold sinks in blue
My heart, with a boy's glad haste,
Crosses the fields—to you.
The roads of the glen grow dim—
Wood-sedges the pheasants flew;
Now the sky is one boundless road
To carry my heart—to you.
The darker the star-strewn field
White-diamonded with dew
And farther removed from sight—
The nearer I creep—to you.
While voices of herd and fold
Grow silent, and bob-white, too,
My heart in the stillness hears
The clear little call—of you.
If this can be prayer, the thing
That longs for and rushes through
This dream-filled dusk to your lips—
All of my prayer is—you.

And—so strange is the power and magic of mind—that this twilight began to tremor romantically and beautifully over long, undulating, tree-laden rural hills and old familiar scenes were beginning to rise and shimmer from long, soft clouds that loomed like hills.

Indescribable, soulful, tremendous fingers were folding

about the artist's eyes, throat and heart when Selma came in from a shopping trip with baby, struck a match to light the lamp almost brutally. Yet her swift, resolute hand broke the cruel dominion that was becoming insufferable.

Almost at her heels Ned Thorpe came hurrying into the cottage with a large canvas, certainly two feet by five. He set it on a chair in one corner of the parlor that served as art gallery and, calling for a light, cried: "Come here, boy, if you want to see something!"

Selma hustled the lamp into the parlor, Gilbert following.

"Bring more light!" Ned commanded. The second lamp bequeathed appreciable illumination.

Gilbert scanned for some moments the large painting of a ship, a three-master, full-rigged, quiet on a serene, windless sea, before commenting.

The sky was a sky of vivid, handsome twilight, the sea reflecting all the rich, myriad radiances of the sky; the ship, painted well into the foreground, a perfect symbol of the peace and tranquility that the title proclaimed. "Becalmed." The painting could not boast any other title.

"Nice piece of work," Gilbert soon suggested, Selma having returned to the kitchen to prepare supper, the baby chattering musically away, her little feet tottering about everywhere.

"Thought you'd say that," Ned replied smiling, his face a radiant study in pride. "Worked hard on that all month. Finally got the trick today of flattening out that water and getting the ship's reflection where it belonged."

"Nice piece of work," Gilbert judged again, looking through the lashes of his eyes, the lids drawn down slightly. "Nice effect of light and shade. The sails are perfectly done, limp, hanging on the masts against the cloudless sky. How did you mix those lovely reds and yellows and keep them so pure, fresh, unmuddied?"

"Can't tell. Pure burst of inspiration, I guess. Nearly gave up in despair last week. Bloomin' thing nearly had me goofy." Ned moved toward the picture and pointed to a distant sail on the horizon line. "Not bad, eh? See how that single touch of lavender-mist sail, suggesting white, shoves the ship foreward and the horizon line way back?"

"You achieved your end that time," Gilbert answered, standing motionless in the doorway, leaning against the door-jam. "There's only one fault with the painting." Slowly he spoke.

"And what's that?"

"It's too perfect."

"Too perfect?" Ned's eyes squinted, a sure sign that he was puzzled.

"Sure is. It lacks something to suggest reality."

"To suggest reality?" Ned echoed, coming closer.

"Yes. No cloud, no ominous shadow on the sea, nothing to suggest the ship is anything except a dream-boat."

"But it was not my intention to suggest anything except a prolonged calm."

"So you've failed. Not the least suggestion of cloud, rain, shadow, emotion, energy. Life or nature is never so absolutely congenial as that interpretation. It's unreal! Life permits no calm without a far-distant mist or growing shadows slowly becoming dominant somewhere. It may be a cloud no larger than the finger of a man's hand, to go back into Biblical history. But you've got to suggest tension, struggle, emotion, or I wouldn't give two cents for any artistic effort!

"Take it home! Make it live! Put life and reality into it!" His voice struck a stiff, preachy tone.

"For heaven's sake, what's come over you?" Ned stuttered, his eyes blinking, moving toward his picture. "I thought sure you'd like this."

"I do—only it's not real."

"But has everything got to be realism, these days? Is idealism out of the running?"

"It is!"

"Baloney!" Ned whirled vociferously back, maneuvering his huge canvas out the front door, hurrying off with it.

The theme thus naturally introduced into the cottage was not suffered to be forgotten. After supper it was further developed. Gilbert bided his time.

Selma had settled down to some necessary mending beside the flickering lamplight. Gilbert had been scanning an art journal.

"What did you think of 'Becalmed'?"

Gilbert spoke in casual manner, lifting his eyes from a page of etchings.

"All ship pictures look alike to me. Don't really care for them." Selma threaded a needle carefully.

"Why don't you?"

"Ships don't interest me in the least."

"They ought to. What is more interesting, heroic or challenging than a clipper ship heading into the wind?"

"Ships don't appeal to me," Selma confessed again, reaching for a second pair of socks. "Land's good enough for me. You'll never get me aboard a ship. I know I'd be beastly sea-sick!"

"If I had a private yacht?"

"Swell chance of that, your bank account gone, selling a picture once a month. Lucky if we have a roof over our heads long. But I'm willing to stick it out. Don't think I'm complaining." Her voice became conciliatory.

"Things are tough." He spoke with decision. "We have sure had our waves to buck. You know the one person in the

world I can't see at all?" A rising, enthusiastic color to his voice.

"Who would you say?" Selma inquired quietly.

"That person in the world, young or old, who deliberately goes about among his fellow men bent on causing trouble. In this world jammed full of bereavement, pain, suffering, cancer, consumption, broken bodies, wars, intrigues, hatreds, horrors—for any one, in such a world as this, to go deliberately forward to hurt somebody else, that person, to me, is the most disreputable and reprehensible critter in the cosmos!"

"My! Preaching again!" Selma exclaimed, not unpleasantly, glancing up from needle and thread.

"Here we are, trying to do the best we can, like men on ships that grapple wind-whirled, terrifying seas. We have got all we can do to keep the prow headed to the wind, somebody succumbing to fear and disease or going mad with suspense all the time. Any one who deliberately goes ahead in the ship to injure or wound any member of the hard-working, fatigued crew ought to be pitched overboard!"

"Why, Gilbert, what ever made you think of all these things now? Hill Grove is a long distance away."

"Never will forget. How can I? Unfrocked from the Ministry. Criticized, scandalized first out of it by professing Christians, supposedly kind, brotherly members of the Lord's Crew on the Good Ship Zion that never gets becalmed or will suffer any pilot to get becalmed. Forget Hill Grove? Forget my own funeral?"

Gilbert was on his feet, pacing in narrow, dizzy circles, hands wildly gesticulating, voice loud and bitter, trying to vanquish still some vast, invisible audience.

Hill Grove loomed suddenly and graphically into the violent tirade and remained there for some time. When Gilbert had subsided Selma stole into the bedroom and returned to

the kitchen, hands behind her back.

"This is the best picture of all!"

She thrust it out energetically into the lamp's light, her face radiant.

"That's where love began!" She enthused.

"What?"

"That is where I really began to get interested in painting—in you. This is my picture."

"But that can't compare with my recent canvasses."

"Yes it can! It's the very bestest painting of them all!"

She held it proudly, victoriously in her hands, over her heart, the shadow of it falling aslant her dress to the waist line.

"I hope, Selma, you wouldn't make me out a liar?"

The sudden tension in his voice disturbed Selma. She laughed, a gay, pretentious laugh.

"Oh, come, Gilbert! Haven't you any sense of humor?"

"Not these days!" he snapped, staring contemptuously at the small picture so tenderly held.

"This is mine. For always. You gave it to me."

Too tenderly she held it.

Of a sudden a swift, invincible hand was thrust forward, snatching the picture, wrenching it from her vainly tightening fingers. He raised his knee and split the picture in two, tore off the frame and flung both into the stove-corner where a wood-box, piled with wood, received them.

"There's your picture," he informed her. "Next time, perhaps, you won't be so smart!"

Selma, her fair, cream-soft skin raging with fiery streams of livid crimson, her little bullet-eyes spitting hatred, defiance, said nothing. Her fists clenched and unclenched. A moment she held this ominous pose. Then the corners of her firm-set lips dropped. Her shoulders relaxed.

The next morning Gilbert copied the clothesline picture for Selma. Same sixe. But neither liked it so well. The colors were not so vivid, the blending not quite so expertly managed.

"I'll go at it again later," he promised.

Selma placed the painting on the shelf in the bedroom and later thumb-tacked it to the wall, where it had hung. The frame had been hopelessly ruined.

"I'll get you a better one, later," he promised.

DAY TO DAY

Selma went for a walk one resplendent afternoon with the baby, now quite a toddler. Passing along, drinking to the full the sweet, invigorating sunlight, she was pleasantly surprised by a homely intrusion.

The little toddler, rambling about from one side of the narrow street to the other, stopped in front of a seated fisherman, mending cordage.

The weather-beaten, sun-bronzed face looked up, the alert, swift-flashing eyes kindled. The man laid aside his work for the moment and bare, bronzed hands gathered the child into his arms.

"And what's yer name? Bet ye're a little girl. Purty enough to be one." The fisherman danced the child in air, then set it down again.

"Her name's Lyris."

Selma stood beside the fisherman, the child clinging to her skirts, staring shyly, with huge wonder in her eyes, at the man who had so swiftly propelled her through the air.

"Never heard that one afore."

The dark brown eyes, seeming almost black when struck by shadow, scanned her jovially. The voice was one of simple, unaffected friendliness.

"It is an unusual name. My husband named her."

"Bet he's one of them that paints pit-chers. Ain't he?"

"Why, yes. How did you guess?"

Selma laughed and the baby crept around her feet to try a look from the other side of her skirts.

"By the name. Only some classy feller would give the kid a classy name like that. Look at her!" He pointed to the child. "Ain't figgered me out yet. Guess she ain't used to sech rough handlin'. 'Leery o' the men!" He broke into a prolonged guffaw as the child, struggling to get farther away, lost hold of the dress and fell down.

"Ain't used to yer sea-legs, be ya? Purty rocky old world, eh?" He guffawed again. Selma, the baby in her arms, walked away, still in her ears the hearty, wholesome laughter of a fisherman.

On Johnson's wharf she spied Gilbert, surrounded by a group of children, painting alone, save for the circle of ardent youngsters. Her heart glowed with new, delightful warmth. It was an hour exquisite. Slowly she approached, the baby now in her arms. The water glimmered endlessly everywhere.

Children's voices called and answered one another; also the frequent hoarse cries of fishermen as they helloed to one another in ships that lumbered by the wharf.

As she drew near she saw him reach out with his right arm and draw a girl of perhaps nine years to him. For a moment he held her tightly in his arms, while with the other, palette and brush cumbering it, he pointed seaward, likely to some distant point he was painting.

He seemed so like himself!

He was fond of children as a rule. In Hill Grove the children had thronged him everywhere. Happy, rapturously happy, she walked back and forth, slowly, around and around, near to him in this strange, foreign environment, feasting her eyes on this lovely scene, this unexpected tryst with beauty.

"You're a sweet girl. Anyone ever tell you?"

Gilbert swept the child closer and kissed the face haloed by the handsome, brown, wind-blown hair.

"Sissy! Oh, Jenny! Jenny's got a feller!"

Screams of merriment, frolicking children, a bashful, blushing girl wriggling from an artist's arm crying: "'Tain't so! 'Tain't so!" Boys crossed fingers at the perturbed, loudly protesting girl.

For the moment Selma felt impelled toward the artist, so evidently enjoying this glamorous, beautiful interruption to labor. She longed to get into that arm, herself, to let him kiss her, to tell him how adorable he was, this moment! In scorn of all the world to hug him, kiss him, love him, then, there, forever!

But Gilbert was turning back to his canvas, reaching into his paint-kit for tubes of color, squeezing the pigment upon the multi-colored palette. Slowly, gratefully she moved away. No woman in all the world was happier than she as she prepared supper that evening.

After the meal she was not quite so certain of her ecstasy. He went out and would not tell her where he was going.

The next morning, early, Gilbert tried his prowess and genius at Singing Beach, Manchester, close to eagle head.

Arthur Brown, driving to Boston for the day, dropped him at the Railroad Station, to pick him up again, later, about five in the afternoon.

Gilbert walked the half mile to the famous long, smooth, slightly beach and selected an interesting vista close to the well-known Eagle Head.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning, the early morning mist slowly lifting, being conquered by the rising sun's ferocious wooing. A blue and grey sea and sky streaked with long, livid shafts of scintillating gold, where the sun's new hoard poured through the sluices of the grey clouds and slowly burnt

up the mist.

To the restful, intriguingly pleasant drumming of a soothing, unruffled tide slowly receding, surrounded by invigorating, smarting sea air that made one aware that his flesh was thrillingly alive, to the monotonous drone of the eternally famished sea gulls, Gilbert sketched in pencil, then began to lay the color on his Academy Board.

He was hastily filling in with browns and grey-lavender the rock outlines of the foreground rearing up from the yellow-ochre sand, the picture beginning to take understandable form when a shadow fell aslant his palette, a long, slender shadow. For the moment he was shaken violently. Artists who record impressions of nature are unbelievably impressionistic themselves! Just the sudden realization that someone, unbeknown, was there, sent him into a drenching sweat.

He was thus brutally whirled out of his intense concentration. It was as though he had been spun from one world to another.

Because he was thus fiercely whirled from his communion he looked up jerkily, annoyed; but swift words that ached to get out were swiftly, completely sent hurtling back into the abyssmal depths of subconsciousness.

"Pardon me if I disturbed. I didn't mean to."

Gilbert wondered if earth had become fairyland while he painted.

Who was this gorgeous, beautiful creature that looked so appreciatively upon him? A girl's glorious face and figure and voice were alone needed to transpose earth to heaven and fling about the precincts an air of the unutterably sublime.

In a vivid saffron and white bathing suit, tall, slender as a yacht's sun-drenched mast, a girl or young woman stood behind him. She held a saffron bathing cap in hand. It did not hide, as yet, the strikingly blonde, puffed-out hair that

haloed her face as though it were an angel's, further promoting the illusion of Paradise. The hair was more colorful than Selma's, the sea-blue eyes remarkably large, wistful, soulful.

But the lips!

A natural vermillion, the redness as if mixed with a subtle shade of lavender, too subtle to see except by an artist's practised eye, the color perfectly natural, the glamour bequeathed by rich, abounding health. The lips curved into Cupid-bows that arched prettily to let fly delicate, entrancing words.

"I live near here—that is, for the summer. Mother paints. I didn't think you'd mind. I love an early dip in the brine before others are astir."

"Mind? Most certainly not. What a break for me—if only an audience of one. Some audience!"

Gilbert, who always spoke with a childlike honesty and fearlessness, sent a new crimson tide spreading over the girl's already rose-spread cheeks. Gilbert noticed the smooth, blending contours of her body, shoulders, waist, thighs, knees, down to the firmly planted feet.

For the moment he was sorry he did not have another piece of Academy Board with him. Yet, strangely and commonly enough, the mood for painting had vanished as by a magic stroke flung onto him by some supreme artist.

He was only eager now to talk, to adore this glorious incarnation of feminine loveliness, to drink it, to fill his eyes, mind and heart with this miraculous manifestation of beauty, sent to him as from the invisible gods.

"Look what I found in the sand this morning," she ventured, after an exchange of greetings and conversation regarding the developing painting.

In her hand she held a little, brown, warped book.

"Found it in the sand, up near the bathing house, on the

rocks."

Gilbert stretched a hand for the little book.

"Why, it's a little khaki New Testament. The kind used by war chaplains. Still can be read, though."

He laid down his palette and brushes and turned the water-soaked, crinkled, stuck leaves over.

"So it's a Bible, is it?" the girl questioned. "I wasn't quite sure."

"A part of it, rather. The New Testament portion. The American Revised Edition. Very popular with scholars. Quite the rage before Weymouth's and Moffatt's translations appeared."

"You know other things beside art, don't you?"

How he loved to hear this girl talk! Culture, refinement, elegance in the very poise and bearing and exhibition of words. A pleasing, singing quality to every tone. Gilbert believed she could sing beautifully with a voice like that.

"Yes, I studied for the Ministry once."

"How interesting! But isn't the combination a rather queer one? I just couldn't imagine our rector out by Eagle Head at nine painting the ocean."

"Some of us are different than others. Remember the old gag—it takes all kinds—"

"Yes, a favorite axiom of mother's, too. But go on with your work. I'm interrupting." She frisked a sun-splashed hand toward the painting prisoned to the easel.

"Lost my muse. Found a better. The spiritual has been vanquished by the physical. Common occurrence."

"Then I shouldn't have intruded. Guess I'd better go."

She moved nervously in the sand.

"Please don't. Not yet."

"Why?"

"I am enjoying this immensely."

"Oh, bother! You know, you men are terribly sincere these days. What a line you have! No wonder you sweep most girls off their feet. This is the world's greatest age."

"Of what?"

"Of flatterers!"

"All right, if you think that. But I meant every word."

"Oh, but they all say that!" she frolicked, swinging her bathing cap around in her fingers.

"But do they mean it?"

"That's what I'd like to know. I've about stopped trying to find out." Again she wriggled cleverly out of his voluble net. It would take an Izaak Walton to sweep a proper net about this handsome, agile creature.

"Well, I'm an artist. Beauty has been the one supreme love of my life. And—to date—you are her finest incarnation."

"What a fine speech, Mr. Artist. My, but you are a dangerous fellow! A clever brush, a clever tongue and a personality that's—well—more than clever! My! I'll have to be careful about these early sallies of mine. Mother says I'm breaking precedents by these unheard-of-ideas."

"Be more likely to break hearts!"

A rollicking, hilarious burst of laughter in a high arc of rich, shattering melody. It rippled down and away into a most annoying chuckle.

Gilbert was now determined to make her laugh; it was more thrilling than a whole symphony orchestra.

"You'd better keep to your pictures," she bade him. "My! What a terror you'd be in salons and ladies' parlors!"

Time passed in invigorating conversation more bracing than sea air. Gilbert watched her stepping, rhythm in her every step, down the beach to the cold, white seam of the mildly falling waters. Youth, health and beauty yielded a certain resilience and springiness to the movement of arms and legs,

the muscles moving on soft, enduring cushions. Charm was written all over her.

He waved a hand to her as she sported about in the water, plunged, swam, over-hand stroke, forward, backward, and dove for bright-colored pebbles.

"I'm so glad I met you," she declared finally, leaving.

"That goes for two," he answered. "And I shall remember you always."

"I doubt it. But I hope so."

She swung about and raced, laughingly, gleefully up the beach and he watched the slender, glorious bit of color merge with the distant greenery. And then it was that he remembered. She reminded him of his dancing partner at Kum Along Inn Carnival Night.

And then terrific, desolating loneliness broke over his mind, spirit and flesh like a tidal wave, almost suffocating him.

In vain he tried to renew his interest in the sun-sparkling ocean, in the stirring contours of Eagle Head. He felt like a fool, felt he must be crying a dry, bitter kind of cry inside of him, tried to laugh at himself, scold himself. Once he hit his own face, knowing it was out of order.

"Straighten out!" he cried, then flung his palette and brushes into the sand. The next moment he realized his mistake, for he had valuable paint on his palette. He had to clean his palette.

In the sand he discerned the little khaki New Testament.

Had she forgotten about it, too, that she last gave it to him to look at? Absent-mindedly he had placed it at his feet by the folding seat of japanned tin.

The weather-bleached, rain-warped little book swept the adorable girl back upon his mind with cruel, devastating bitterness. He fancied it in her hands—those lovely white hands of the tapering, active fingers. The hands brought back

her slender, beautiful outline, the sweet, virginal aura of her whole being, the bright, scintillating sea-blue eyes, the rippling, shattering laughter, the nicely-arched lips of rambler-rose red.

Tenderly, prayerfully he held the little volume in his hands; not only because of distant thoughts; but because of very near memories. Because a girl's beautiful hand had last held it. Who before her—and before that one—and so on?

Gilbert unwrinkled and pressed open the pages again, and commenced to read—

"But I say unto you—love one another, for love is of God. He who loveth knoweth God, for God is love."

Gilbert pressed the little book with great but not with fierce pressure. His soul and life pulsed through his fingers into the little book. Love suffused him, transfigured him on the shore, the tide still musically receding, new and more bathers appearing on Singing Beach. He was thinking of an ardent disciple who in Ephesus spoke those glowing words to a little gathering of devoted Christians.

He thought of another, a Young Man with flame-eyes, strong face and gentle demeanor, who spoke similiar words in a dimly-lit upper room beside a table spread.

He thought of childhood, youth, seminary, church, Hill Grove.

Then, choking, driving his hand over his eyes, he ran to the seam of white on the beach and threw the little book that again burned in his hand like live coals, back into the sparkling blue tide going out . . . going out . . . going out.

DREAMERS, TOILERS

Then came the bitter-sweet November morning when Selma missed Lyris. She thought the baby was romping in the play-pen in the studio-parlor with blocks, toys, picture-books. A nervous sally into the room revealed an empty play-pen, the front door open.

What crueler fear ever lashes and tears open a mother's heart and flesh than this: a lost baby?

"My baby! My baby!" she cried frantically, running down the front steps, her swift-flashing eyes racing about everywhere faster than her electrified limbs. She knew almost at once that the baby had toddled from home. And water, water everywhere! Sick, weak with fear, she started down the North Dock road.

"Mrs. Channing, what is it?" the woman across the way inquired.

"My baby! She's gone!"

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed the buxom matron, laying down a basket of clothes, following anxiously down the road after the frantic mother.

"My baby! Have you seen her?" Selma asked the old man at the corner. A fisherman, nearby, listened.

"Yes. She went along behind another woman a few minutes ago. I thought she was with the lady."

"Which way?"

"Toward town."

Selma thanked God for that.

"Here lady, wait a minute! I'll help!"

The friendly fisherman who had danced Lyris in the air lurched up from nets and lobster traps piled in his long, narrow yard, and leaping over them, in heavy rubber boots, hurried after the mother.

"Go up the North way, I'll fetch up on the South," he said. "Save time. Git back here as soon as we can git. Meet at the corner."

Selma raced down one street, calling, questioning, crying; the fisherman bolted clumsily, in rubber boots, down another.

In another twenty minutes the trembling mother, returning, crazed with fear, from far down the North Road, looking toward the corner, caught sight of a tall, black blur, a splotch of red in the midst of it.

"My baby! My baby!" she cried, delirious with joy; and, driving forward, her knees miraculously eased of their stiffness and pain, arms outstretched, face lit with rainbow light, apron blowing up around her in the wind, she neared the corner.

"Thanks so much! Oh, Lyris! Lyris! My baby! My baby!"

Hands snatched the child as from death and the little, surprised, wriggling body was pressed hungrily against Selma's full, shaken breasts.

"Why did you run away? Why did you go off like that? Didn't you know you might get lost, get killed, fall into the water, get trampled by the horses, or kidnapped or something?"

Selma chattered, scolded worse than a child, assuming that the bewildered child could understand and respond intelligently. The child only kept on wriggling in the mother's arms, toying with a cheap necklace and staring at the big, tall fellow who had acted toward her as though he were her father.

After the first flood of relieving ecstasy had subsided a

little, Selma turned to the fisherman, looking silently, stolidly on, the pleasure kindling in his eyes, the only visible sign of his great delight. Her hand and heart went out to him.

"I can never thank you enough," she confessed, gratitude and joy and a far, faint mist of tears glorifying her eyes.

The man shrugged his shoulders, stood a mite less awkwardly, pursed his lips as though about to gnaw off a chew of tobacco. His fingers twitched in sudden nervousness.

"That ain't nothin', lady. Ain't I got a woman and kids o' me own? Don't ye s'pose I knew how ye felt? If anythin' happened to me little Bess—well—don't like to think 'bout it. I'd do it fer any woman any time, lady. Glad I caught the kid. She was up in Norton's yard, playin' with their young un. The mother was wonderin' who she was and where she hailed from."

Selma accompanied the fisherman back to North Dock, swayed by new, surprising thoughts. Could she really get to like fishermen? How her still heaving mother-heart went out to the simple, awkward fellow with the sun-tanned face like old, tough leather.

All she could talk about for days was this friendly, affable fellow. Finally Gilbert found in the encounter a chance to elucidate a favorite theme.

"Thought you didn't care for the sea, the ships, cordage, nets and such things?" A perfectly natural broaching of the subject.

"I don't."

"But you talk incessantly about fishermen."

"No, I don't. I only talk about one. And I am beginning to realize the simple, hardy strength of these toilers of the sea."

"Nice language, Selma. Nobody would ever dream you were a Finn."

Selma's lips broke apart angrily; but she paused before

submitting a reply.

"Things tend to become like those with which they are associated!"

"Whew!" Gilbert whistled. "Keep on and you will be an orator yet. But to return to the subject. Remember this. Fishermen get a break in life."

"A break in life—with their long, hard struggle against the sea?" Selma's eyes suggested many questions.

"Yes, a break! Let me see. What is it I read in my English course. Oh, yes, something about a life on the rolling deep, the best life of all. Maybe it is. A life of work—just plain, simple, constant toil."

"And you think that's getting a break?" Questions had not moved a hair's breadth from the narrow, intense eyes.

"Sure is! They don't have to suffer hell with dreams!"

Selma forgot the heap of sewing on her lap. She gave Gilbert utter attention. She knew he would continue after a brief pause.

"Work! Work! Work! Nets! Tide! Barter! Fish merchants! Back to the seas again! The seas are full of fish! Always a living somewhere!"

"But what about the world's dreamers? Fishing for things they never catch. Out after beauty, excellence, seeking perfection—over the skyline, over the skyline, over the skyline and on! Enraptured, enthralled into wordless ecstasy by a beauty that sweeps by in the night. Driven restlessly, furtively on for some vast, transcendent yield of beauty and rapture that one never drags ashore from the depths or brings down from the shoreless sky.

"But ever chasing it, seeking it, panting, dying, crying for it!"

Gilbert was again pacing the narrow, well-filled kitchen floor in dizzy, swift circles like a tiger in a cage. Selma, under

the spell of his passion and language, as always in such an hour, listened, unable to move or speak, thoroughly possessed and rendered a helpless, immobile thing by his masterful fascination.

"We never get what we're after! So we bring back our poor, but our treasured next-best, the nearest things we can get to beauty—paintings, drawings, musical compositions, stories, poems, essays, blue-prints of glorious architecture, lunges at life-throbbled sculpture. Dreamers are ever and always one and the same thing—even in the realm of ethics and religion.

"We bring back to market our poor attempts at imperishable beauty. And who wants them? We peddle our pushcart loads up and down the streets, down and up the streets. Who buys? Who wants to buy the trash for which we live, burn out, waste away and die?

"See the dilemma? If we give up the quest we shrivel down like ashen autumn leaves into nothing. And if we can't give up the quest we can't live—we starve. The superficial, leering world tortures us, telling us to dump overboard our crazy produce!

"Who wants such junk in these straightened, difficult times as pretty pictures, nicely-worded essays, idealistic love? What fools we are, goaded on by tremendous, invisible powers only to rush headlong and sail madly after the mirage, the futile gleam, which, if ever seen, the world will only throw out!

"And yet—" Selma felt impelled to arrest this desolating, brackish tide—"And yet a Carpenter, so I've heard you preach, with such a far, fond Dream as you've just mentioned, lived in the world, kept his Dream and broke the world. And that Dream is the loveliest thing that ever haunted the world. It haunts us still."

With cool, even expression she spoke, eyes riveted upon his face.

"And the black, killing thing about it is that those who ought to have enough sense to believe in that Dream won't accept it; they throw it out."

"Then He lost, didn't He?" Gilbert whirled back, his voice brittle and harsh as empty kegs. "Then He failed! And if He did—let's pull down the curtain. If He was wrong, then all the best things in life are wrong, we are hopeless fools in all our clumsy attempts at the pattern of life and the sooner the whole crazy business of living is over the better!"

Gilbert's face paled into a pasty white. He reeled as a drunken man and sank into a chair, bent his head to his hands and groaned. Selma watched his long, thin fingers digging fiercely into his scalp. Over-awed by her own unsuspected outburst she watched the suffering youth a moment, then whirled noisily about and vanished into the bedroom.

For hours Gilbert did not retire.

Selma was not certain in the morning whether he had lain down for a while or not. He was not at home when she awoke at dawn.

On the kitchen table she found his Bible open, rummaged from somewhere. It was a shock. He never looked at it now.

Ink lines were circled about these sentences—

"But I say unto you—Love one another, for love is of God. He who loveth knoweth God, for God is love."

The thin India-paper was wrinkled, marred. It looked as though the pages had lain outdoors in the dampness all night.

WEDDING NIGHT

Ned Thorpe insisted that Gilbert and Selma attend the wedding festivities at the home of his fiancé, Ann Preston. They must attend the ceremony and remain for the reception, following.

"I'd rather not, Ned."

But objections were heartily over-ruled by the enthusiastic bridegroom.

Selma was delighted.

"I'd love to go," she informed Ned and Gilbert, her face radiant. "I've hardly been anywhere since we've been in Rockport. It will be a real treat for me. I'll get the girl across the street to stay with Lyris."

Some sixty invited guests thronged the front room of Ann Preston's well-to-do home on the heights. The gayly festooned, decorated rooms, the elegantly gowned ladies, the men in their immaculate black, the incessant merriment, the flower-laden atmosphere, freighted with carnations, sweet peas and maiden-hair fern, all witnessed to life's superlatively blessed hour.

It was a simple, inspiring parlor wedding, a Reverend Mr. Davies from Salem officiating, college friend of Ned's.

The preceding joy and ecstatic fervor gave place to deep, soulful quietness as a girl's hand awaited the bestowal of a ring. The little black book lay open in the hands of a clergyman; his voice, clear and reverent, read the marriage service;

above and behind the arc of an inner circle were stacked flowers and a huge white wedding bell. Relatives and friends listened appreciatively to the words, many in the company knowing them by heart, yet giving ear to them as devoutly as though heard for the first time.

Selma, standing beside Gilbert, realized that he was sweating profusely and trembling. He rubbed his hands together, wrinkled the flesh on knuckles and fingers, lifted a hand to his head, ran his fingers through his hair. In another moment he swept a handkerchief across his forehead, coughed and cleared his throat. The coughing continued and increased strength.

"What is the matter?" Selma whispered hoarsely.

"Don't know. Throat's terrible scrapy."

Renewed coughing sent Gilbert into the kitchen for a glass of water.

Here he met a stranger, Paul Sloane by name, a young man about his own age, somewhat smaller and slighter of build, an incessant smoker, with a careless, swaggering manner.

"Pretty close in there," Sloane stated.

"Rather. But I seldom ever get to coughing. Don't know what happened."

"Probably the heat or nervousness. Tension, maybe, over-excitement. Throat is extremely sensitive."

While the wedding ceremony proceeded in the parlor, Gilbert and Sloane moved into the small, cheery study for a little talk.

Gilbert disclosed his identity. An artist trying to make a living in a machine age, in a post-war chaos, and going steadily behind.

"I'm in the same predicament," Sloane returned. "I'm a writer. Fiction, articles, verse. I've tried my hand at all three.

Make a dozen sales a year or so. Maybe five hundred bucks in all. If the old man didn't have plenty dough I'd be— well, where would I be?"

"Then the writing game isn't so encouraging, either?"

"Flatter than flat. See the size of the magazines? Shrunk to dish-rags, many of them. Very little space, a heap of old, intrenched authors. Very few editors who dare to hazard an unknown's work these days. You ought to know some of my comrades in New York, freezing, starving in 'Gren'itch', if you want to see men and women chasing mirages. It's a damn shame! Mighty fine folks, too, some of them! It's the times!

"Wrote a poem a couple of years ago that made the grade in one of the better monthlies. Got a prize for it, too. Wrote it after spending a few days with a crowd in Bohemia. 'Gren'itch', I mean. Like to hear it? I've quoted the darn thing so many times it's got stuck in the muck of memory."

"Sure. Go ahead. I can stand a poem now and then. Not to write. To read it."

"Okay then. Here goes,—

"They told me I sold my life for hope,
For the rags of hope in the dawn;
And they think I cry in the winter wind
When the motley throngs have gone.

They told me I bartered my soul for song
And have done it time and again
For the slender thread of a minstrel's lay,
For the rhyming lines of men.

That I heaped my all in the balances
And have gone where fools belong,
Alone through the storm and the circling dark
In a rag with a snatch of song."

Gilbert, while paying rapt attention was, nevertheless, thinking of Ned Thorpe, his courage, his wedding, his obvious poverty, his lack of understanding, of creative genius, his love of dreams. He was thinking of delightful Ann Preston. In another room Ned was getting married. On what, for what, to what? Gilbert knew, by the soft, modulated voice penetrating from the parlor, that while Sloane, between bursts of cigarette smoke, recited his poetry, the Rev. Mr. Davies was offering the wedding prayer. The two voices blended in strange, bewildering fashion.

 "For my soul is warm in the dark and cold
 And my song curls sweet to the light
 While the high-flung stars burn low to lead
 A seeker home through the night—"

"You wrote that?" Gilbert interrupted.

"So far as I know."

"Boy! That's great stuff! That's almost a sermon!"

"Sermon?" Sloane questioned. "Hardly that, my friend. But wait till I finish. Another quatrain to it."—

 "Full many I passed in the wind and dusk
 Bent down to the streets and old;
 And may God Most High have tears for those
 Without my rags in the cold."

Sloane tilted back in his chair, smoking, studying Gilbert critically, intently, one hand in his vest pocket, the other on his cigarette.

"You like it?" he ventured.

From the parlor filtered the solemn words—

"Grant to these two an abounding measure of Thy Grace, that they may live lives of honor and righteousness. And may love, Thy love, be the cornerstone of their hearts and home. Grant that they shall live by faith in the eternal verities, whatever be their earthly estate. And may they follow the Gleam

'o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent till the night is gone'. For richer, for poorer, O Lord, grant that they shall be true to the heart's highest affairs, those of faith, hope and love. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

"Like it?" returned Gilbert. "I wish I could have been the author. Did you notice that you were in perfect tune with the pastor?"

"Meaning what? Suppose you explain."

"While the pastor was, in his prayer, bidding Ned and Ann to live by the invisible raiment—hope, faith, love, you were quoting your lines about the rags of hope, their warmth and victory."

"Quite a lad for analysis, aren't you?"

"Not as a rule. But, you see, I know the wedding ceremony very well. And though I've never written poems, it was not difficult to get the slant of your's. What did you give it for title?"

"My Rags."

"Perfect."

A half dozen people moved into the study, the wedding ceremony completed.

"Pardon me," Gilbert suggested. "I must be getting back to the Mrs."

"Certainly."

"Thanks for the poem."

"Thank you for listening to my effusion."

"That was no effusion. That was—life."

Selma seemed to be enjoying every moment of the joyous reception, meeting people, revelling in flowers, music and good fellowship.

"But what made you cough so?" she later inquired, in the cottage.

"That's precisely what I'd like to know. Sloane said it

was nervous excitement."

"Probably he was right. I noticed how terribly nervous you were in the parlor."

"Perhaps there was a reason."

"Undoubtedly there was."

"It suddenly occurred to me that I could never marry folks again. While standing there. How I used to love the weddings, the young people that used to come tripping up the cement walk, ringing the bell! I always scented a wedding! Ministers can!

"Just the way the young couple walk, the shy, awkward manner in which they approach a house and the young man asks timidly: 'Is the minister in?' It suddenly occurred to me that I could never perform that service to young people again. 'The tender grace of a day that is dead will never come back to me.' Yes, Tennyson knew, too, the cruelty of disillusionment and bereavement!"

Selma, looking upon Gilbert's pain-contorted face, sensed the hidden anguish.

"Never again can I speed a young couple down the bridal-path! Never again! The pools in the desert have dried up! And may God Most High have tears for those without my rags in the cold!"

A startling, fierce outburst of words; strange, unknown to Selma. Gilbert flung them hotly from his twitching lips, full into her questioning face.

"God have tears—have tears!" he cried again and bolted from the house.

"Gilbert, come back! Please come back!" she called after his quickly vanishing figure.

For hours he did not return.

Close to morning she heard his feet on the front steps. They were his footfalls; they were not his footfalls. Someone

entered into the studio clumsily, noisily.

"That you, Gilbert?"

Selma sat up in bed and strained her eyes to pierce the thick, impenetrable gloom.

There was no reply.

"That you, Gilbert?"

She heard the footfalls plunging into the kitchen. There was the crash of an overturned chair, the groaning of a table under sudden, cruel pressure and a thunderous thud on the kitchen floor. Selma hastened into her kimono and lit the lamp and passed into the kitchen. Lyris awoke, crying violently.

There he lay, sprawled headlong on the floor, his feet under the table, his head at the foot of the stove, the chair overturned, half across his motionless shoulders, the back of it hard up against the stove front.

He had never come home like this before.

Dead . . . drunk . . .

MOONLIGHT

"Are you planning to go to Gloucester this week end?" Selma spoke across the supper table. It displayed a modest supply of eggs and corn-beef hash, cheese and hot muffins.

Gilbert's eye, roving out the window, had got tangled inextricably in the sails of ships that loomed from the purple distances.

"This is exceptionally fine weather for late fall. We really need some things for Lyriss."

Gilbert chewed mechanically on the buttered half of his muffin and let it slide into his mouth. The other hand stirred the coffee for the fourth time. Again Selma ventured conversation, getting at the matter in another way.

"Ned is going to Gloucester Saturday afternoon, isn't he? Didn't he say something to you to that effect?"

Still that absent, far-away look in his eyes, the face a blank, the mind a million miles off shore. Selma gave up. With swift, brittle words she scolded.

"Gilbert, do artists live in another world?"

She set the cup into the saucer noisily, to wake him.

"You—you speaking to me?" The eyes turned upon her, as from immensity.

"I thought so, Gilbert! You didn't hear a word, did you?"

"Of what?"

"There! I knew it!"

Another world? Precisely!

Selma had suspected the extraordinary, sensitive make-up of this youth; but this constant mooning, his relentless wool-gathering, it was bothering her, annoying her.

Where were his thoughts now most of the time? It was a constant question with Selma: "A penny for your thoughts!" Grinning, silent he would walk away from her questioning. Poor company. Late to dinner, late to supper. Frequently he failed to come home at all.

"When I'm painting I never think of supper," he would say with grave finality.

Was it really painting that stole his thoughts from her, from Lyris, from the cottage? Usually he liked to talk matters over with her; now she faced a grim, dark, impenetrable silence. To her young, eager, emotional flesh it was cold, forbidding, desolate as the frozen North.

"I'm going out," Gilbert said directly, now thoroughly escaped from the muse.

"And where tonight?"

"Up to Eagle Head again."

"What for."

"Moonlight scene."

"You mean, paint after dark? How?"

"No. Just to get an impression. Fill my mind with the subject—paint it later."

"But why go so far? Plenty of moonlight in Rockport and Gloucester."

"I like Singing Beach, the graceful shore-line, the rough contours of Eagle Head. A glorious sea-expanse unfolds from those rocks." He ran an agile hand through his thick, wavy hair.

"But you have no conveyance." Selma pattered with an unmannerly bobby-pin.

"Ned Thorpe said he'd lend me the car for tonight."

"But you have no license."

"He has."

"But you spoke as though he wasn't going along."

"He isn't!"

"Gilbert, you're taking an awful chance!"

"Think so?"

In another three hours Gilbert parked the car in the beach-road circle, locked it and ventured upon the soft, grey-white sand that emitted a gruff, musical sound as one crunched it down—a curious effect that accounted for the singular name of this exclusive summer bathing resort.

The stars.

They always fascinated him, and he enjoyed immensely trying to think of fitting descriptions for them. The tapers in the great God's hall, that burned ageless, beautiful and white? A glorious, immeasurable garden of the gods frosted over with daisies? The shy, laughing or blinking eyes of heaven's adorable and countless dream-children?

Gilbert recalled an imperishable sentence from a favorite thinker of the past, one he had often quoted in sermon material.

"Too low they build who build beneath the stars."

The dark green waves, almost black, piled their white-churned yeast-form, mounds of the wind-tossed foam upon the long, scimitar shore-line. He loved the deep-throated, thrilling bass of the ocean that sang its eternal, compelling night-song to the stars.

He watched the full moon rising, lifting itself up from the summit of Eagle Head and slowly ascending, like a Queen in silver-brocaded gown, the great stairs of the sky. The stars now seemed to be gentle, winsome maids-in-waiting, attending their Queen, surrounding her, sporting with her. Gilbert was lost in this moon-pearled reverie, seated on a huge, smooth-

surfaced boulder near Eagle Head, when he became aware of loud, rollicking voices.

Young people were gayly disporting themselves along the beach, not a great distance away, navigating in his direction. He observed, almost a quarter of a mile away, the parking lights of a car. He had snapped his off. These were also late-comers; perhaps, also, lovers of beauty?

Yet Gilbert knew, almost at once, that they were not either artists or convivial spirits. Their language revealed them. Their antics gave them away.

Petting party presumably.

Slowly four silhouettes loomed into prominence.

Gilbert slid from the boulder's smooth surface and got behind it. He did not wish to be molested. They did not wish to be molested. Again a boisterous earth had ended his communion with the Invisible Beauty he kept long tryst for.

"I didn't want to go tonight!" one voice complained.

"Or I!"

"Nor I! Impossible things!"

"Her games are all passè. And she'll be stuck around some monocled duke all night anyhow! Bunch of moss-backs and a few stringy debs! Maybe a grand-dame or two!"

"I like it better here anyway! Lots more fun. C'm on, Cheery, give me another coffin-nail!" Pitifully thin snickering made brief intrusion into the wave-thunderous night.

"The voice. I know that voice. It's the girl I met the other morning. I know it is!"

These sentences raced through Gilbert's mind. He glanced keenly at the approaching young people and now distinctly made out the tall, rhythmic outline of the girl whose name he didn't know, yet who had shaken his soul immeasurably. He had dared hope to find her. A crazy dream! Yet—here she was!

The girl laughed, arched her neck toward a match a man called Cheery struck, and promptly proceeded to cover his face with a smoke-screen.

"Hey! Lay off! What do you think I am? A poisonous insect?"

"Insect is right!" another voice chirped. "I'd say—bed bug! Never get up until noon. Oh, boy, do some people live!"

Gilbert observed that his dream-girl was an expert smoker and clever and accomplished in the use of cynicism. Had he not recognized her voice, the very inflection of her words, the way she dropped consonants from certain words, he could not have identified her.

"Gee! Are we punning tonight!" another voice inveigled.

The girl stalked along the beach now, elegantly clad, strutting, posing, making use of a set of expertly trained manners and endeavoring to be as chic and nonchalant as possible. She grabbed Cheery's arm; she got to wrestling with him in the sand, lost her cigarette, picked it up again, found it covered with sand, threw it down, searched Cheery's pockets for the pack and helped herself to another. She fell against him, getting it lighted again, as though she failed endeavoring to lean upon the wind.

Gilbert, thanking his lucky stars for concealment, felt himself like a boy who sneaks into a side-show only to regret he hadn't tried to invade the big tent, disappointed by a bleak performance.

The four seated themselves on a clump of rocks and proceeded to pet, to try their minds at punning, to out-do one another scolding and lambasting civilization.

Suddenly a roar of merriment.

"Me first!" three cried.

"C'm on, Cheery. Me first!" the tall girl repeated. "You

said I could if I came!"

Cheery held up a bottle to the star-wreathed skies. Four sets of eyes rotated around it and four figures huddled to it. Fingers rose and fell in the night less rhythmic than the waves.

Cheery handed it to the tall girl. She leaped to her feet, tall, beautiful in silhouette against the star-points and moon-gems of the night. The wind, lustily voyaging in from sea, blew aside the light coat from the waist down and flattened her dress against her limbs; they reared like young, immortal trees of the primeval forest that had been suddenly, miraculously transplanted to this moonlit shore, growing out of the ageless rock.

A strange, baffling realization; part of an artist's stock-in-trade of impressions. Yes, he knew that body—its youthful, delightful symmetry, the intriguing toss of the head.

Again the resonant, soulful voice shook him up. How he loved its crystal-clear quality! Worship and repudiation charged upon him in one mad rush and struggle.

"I'll give you a toast!" the tall girl shouted. "A toast to the night, the sea, the moon! A real one! Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears!"

"Go on! Go on!" the others roared in delirium.

"To the Moon!" the young, rollicking voice, now grown lighter, cried. An artificial rhapsody had invaded the voice. It had lost its deeper range. Her right arm shot upward, up through the star-laden dusk, a bottle sparkling with the countless rhinestones of the night.

"To that crazy old bachelor, keeping house all alone to-night and forever. Poor nut! He's full tonight. Why not? Last month he gave away his halves and quarters! So tonight he's celebrating his tough luck, like us, getting full! So I bid you all drink—drink a health to the moon! But may you never be so unfortunate as to have no lady-love on a clear, bright

night!" She took another breath. "This is the only night he cares about and the only night we're sure of. So let's go. Let's drink it, with him, to the full!"

Cheery, rocking with merriment, reached up and pulled the girl down upon his lap. There was a scramble in the darkness, an indistinct blur of whirling figures, a riot of voices, a commingling of wild, ungovernable phrases.

The stars looked down.

The wind-churned seas broke violently apart in thin, long fragments along a shore littered by sea-drift. A sail of lavender-mist slowly slid across the skyline, to sink into the sea. A cloud blotted out the scene and the night from the eyes of one the artist thought of as our Lady Moon, a glorious, enchanting god-creature of the love-enamored dark.

The light went out of an artist's eye.

Slowly, bitterly, hatefully he slipped away from the riotous voices, keeping low among the stacked boulders, slinking like a whipped, hurt creature, off into the obliterating, lonely dark.

God! Was that the girl he had longed for, hoped to see again, blessed in waking and dreaming hours? Had his heart felt a great, insatiable need to drink again at the magic fountains of her eyes?

He suffered as the two vivid images of her strove like giants within him for the mastery.

First, he was certain the girl of the sunny dawn would win out; then the girl of the riotous night emerged compelling, desolating. Beauty and banality fought fiercely for the victory.

A glorious voice strove with the cynical gesture; the beautiful face fought with the ugly grimace. Lovely eyes struggled against ignoble postures. Love and lust were whirled together in staggering denouement.

Gilbert, his mind in a bitter, ominous whirl, drove back to Rockport, the idea of a moonlight scene at Singing Beach hav-

ing been as utterly blotted out as though it had never been purposed.

He went back to Selma, to the tiny cottage; and he crawled into bed and hoped sleep would cast its obliterating star-strewn mantle over the cruel evening and wipe it out.

In the morning Selma complained.

"What on earth was the matter with you last night? Did you see spooks at the beach?"

"Spooks?"

"Yes, yes! You were thrashing about last night in bed like a person demon-possessed! I awoke a half dozen times, I guess. Last time I heard you yelling something like—'You'd kill me, would you? Don't you come any nearer! Don't you dare to! I hate you! You're not real! You're a lie! So get away from me!' Honest, Gilbert, you frightened me." Selma shivered.

"I'm sorry. Didn't mean to," Gilbert answered slowly, his face blended into tragic, paling seriousness. "But last night I did—" He broke his sentence brutally in two. "Please forget it. And if you want to do me a favor, never mention last night." He left the room.

Still later, in less than a week's time, Gilbert ventured this much to Selma.

"What is it that artists are in love with—beauty and its forms? Do we love people or our ideals of people? Can we love people if we find they are not what we dream them to be? Do we love flesh and bone or do we love the immortal soul? Are we not always, in vital truth, in love with an invisible something that is beautiful, pure and engaging when we love people?"

"If we discover that that dies, can we still love? Are we able to? Can we love and despise at one and the same time? Could we rejoice to hear, say, the voice part and try

to cut off the hands Could we keep some things and throw other things away and still keep our tryst with beauty? Would we be able to?"

"Do you expect me, Gilbert, to answer such questions as those?"

Selma laughed, fussed with her pretty hair and glanced coyly at him from the playfully slanted face.

"Who do you think I am—Madame President?"

Chuckling gayly she turned back to the centerpiece she was industriously embroidering.

UNWARRANTED INTRUSION

Gilbert was ominously recovering from painting-fever.

In one of the increasingly rare moments when the fascination of the sea preyed comfortably upon him he sat painting a portion of Rockport's small harbor in the shade of an old fish storehouse. Perhaps the unexpected visit of an Indian Summer day had thrilled his flesh and brain again.

He busied himself with the delineation of the picturesque, colorful fishing boats, skiffs, punts and motor-boats that sway at their moorings, day to day, in this cramped, curious harbor.

An elderly woman, in the shade of the adjoining warehouse, was painting leisurely in water colors. One young man had completed an interesting pencil sketch and had vanished.

Gilbert was enjoying this peaceful interlude of rest and rejuvenation, mixing his colors, working out a new color scheme in greens for promontory background, sunlit water and heavy shadows, when he became aware of voices steadily growing louder.

At first the voices seemed to be feminine; a masculine quality, however, soon emerged from the confusion to dominate it. Half consciously he listened, blending shadows with pier-heads on an obtruding wharf.

The people, whoever they were, happened to be having an unbelievably good time. Two differently pitched feminine

voices now became distinguishable, gayly cavorting with the sonorous, refined accents of the nicely maneuvered masculine voice.

"Alicia, didn't you say you had a temptation toward art in your palmy days?" a feminine voice frisked.

"Me? Oh, no! I wouldn't know how to hold a brush, myself. But I think it's real exciting to watch these amusing people at work. One does find such rare types, such unusual types around Rockport!"

Gilbert was conscious the elderly lady, across the way, stared severely at the critics.

"It does afford a pleasing diversion to the hum-drum inanities of a city parish!" The masculine voice became prominent now. "This kind of thing is so utterly different to anything in the city that it refreshes me. And pastoral and parish work are so terribly involved and annoying these days."

"But you do uncommonly well, doctor, and you have a gratifyingly large parish."

"And a wealthy one," the other feminine voice chirped. "How long a vacation did you take, doctor?"

"Three months. But I have an able—a remarkably able assistant. I have every measure of confidence in the young man."

"Isn't that an astonishingly long time for a vacation, doctor?"

"Not for me. Anyway, I have run rather low on sermon material and original ideas. It is so trying these days, with unemployment, economic maladjustment, throngs crying havoc everywhere. Europe in such distressing shape—it is very trying to endeavor to comfort and pacify wealthy parishioners now taxed unmercifully by government."

"But you are never at a loss for words, doctor."

"Seldom, my dear Annetta, seldom. And then, remember,

I only get eight thousand a year now. That entitles me to a longer vacation. Oh, I'm in no hurry to get back. The communicants will fare very satisfactorily on young Dr. Burton's diet. A smart, an able—a remarkably able young man. From an old, outstandingly distinguished family, too."

"I heard, though, that he wasn't a phenomenal success in college," a feminine voice parried.

"But, Alicia, he is such a grand person! Haven't you observed him in the pulpit? A very handsome preacher! Tall and straight! Why, he becomes the gown, I should say, rather than to say that the gown becomes him. I love to watch his movements about the sanctuary. So graceful and worshipful. One can fairly see God in it all. My! He is really an adorable young man!"

"But, my dear Alicia, one's eyes must be focused rather toward the invisible," the masculine voice suggested.

A short, teasing kind of laughter.

"I expect so, doctor. But, ah, one does love to see a tall, straight young man before the altar. Oh! It is so appropriate!"

"Appropriate?" two other voices questioned.

"Perhaps I should say: it is so refreshing."

"Refreshing?" two other voices questioned.

"Oh! I don't know what to say!" the chattering, bubbling voice stuttered.

Gilbert turned about.

A few yards away, standing breezily, proudly on the wharf, were most colorful, impressive people.

The first impression was of an ebony stand between two remarkable flowers, the vase gone, the long, curious, spindling flowers on the ground, teetering in winds against the immaculate, pompous ebony stand.

Soon the tall, nicely-groomed man loomed to better ad-

vantage, a man in the sixties likely, exceedingly tall, straight in immaculate black suit and shoes, black-felt hat, glistening-bright cane and spectacles with long, glittering silver chain pinned to his coat. A buttonaire in his coat-lapel, a flower the color of Annetta's brilliant, old-rose dress.

Alicia was a long, flaming burst of nearly every color, her dress a riot of intriguing witchery.

Gilbert lost interest in painting. He wished, for the moment, that he was an expert caricaturist with the pen. What couldn't he do with those three for subjects!

"I wonder what artists really see in these crude people," the carmined lady declared. "Yet they haunt these wharves painting crude, common, even vulgar fishermen!"

"Listen, my dear Annetta."

The spare person in ebony with the smooth-shaven, fissured face spoke deliberately, readjusting his spectacles to his nose, peering into the water-line, quite some distance below, looking over the rims, twiddling his cane.

"Artists paint anything that comes into their minds. That's a way artists have. Fickle, elusive visionaries. Never practical, never, my dear Annetta. A crust of bread is enough food for them, a glass of milk, a mug of beer. They live any old way, thrown together like flotsam and jetsam of life. The moral condition of artists is, you must know, one of the scandals of civilization."

"Why, doctor, you don't say!" one woman replied, awe-stricken; but her ears lifted for more. The second woman vied with the first for the major portion of available attention.

"To be sure! Artists are queer creatures. Anything will do, so long as they can think of something to paint and find something to paint it on. They become almost dead to moral values under the obsession to daub.

"Mind you, they are interesting creatures, for all that;

but the despair of our vast institutionalized religious systems. The Church's magnificence means utterly nothing to these peculiar people. They much prefer rain-soaked docks, ugly fishing boats and unsightly old rocks to the sacred vessels of the sanctuary."

"What a shame! What a pitiful thing!" the soprano voices mourned.

"Indeed, my dears. But these are artists. The strangest of creatures. They say it's all a question of beauty. I often wonder, because I can't see their point of view."

"Then they must be wrong, doctor."

"Tut! Tut! Annetta, you flatter me."

"Oh, not, really not, doctor."

Like a brilliant carmine moth she fluttered up against the ruddy, rotund face that beamed profusely down upon her. The second worked around on the other side to break the too-long spell the first was casting.

"I don't really see what they see in nature. I've tried to, now and then. Purple shadows, blue hills, red in rocks, orchid in horizon lines. No! It is all foolishness to me."

"And to me!"

"And me!"

The positive, fluttering choir never failed to sound the "grand Amen" in the fitting pause.

Gilbert felt his blood pounding through his veins, smashing up against his temples. He craved to push the three of them off the wharf, into the water. But could he be sure the ladies could take a drenching without incurring heart failure? Chances were they couldn't.

"Artists, you know, are actually freaks, I should say. Something a little extraordinary and peculiar about them. Why, I read once that they fall in love with birch trees, waterfalls, sunsets, tufts of grass, autumn foliage; and, I guess

they'd run off with every pretty pair of eyes they saw, they would steal them and run away with them, if they could!"

"How thrilling, doctor! This is as good as a Circle Lecture!"

One woman at last had broken the other's spell. She clapped her hands, tilted her maidenly head absorbed in a wide sun-bonnet. It bobbed—and the other's bonnet bobbed—the two of them bobbed gaily about the imperious, immaculate black like June moths about a glittering arc lamp. They would have fluttered against it had they dared.

"Oh, I've read very considerable on this subject. I aim never to express my mind on a given subject without full and complete knowledge, in case of rebuttal!"

"Well, here's your rebuttal!"

Gilbert, tall, straight, stern, a youth in working clothes, hair tumbling over and back again in the wind, faced the three surprised talkers.

"You're all wet!"

A strong, resolute hand shot out. The immaculate black was dropped, like an aspen leaf, off the wharf into the water. Horror deluged the women as the man splashed into the brine.

"Help! Murder! Police!"

Bedlam broke loose, frantic cries, stamping feet; one of the women pounding him with gentle, pitiful little hands.

"It's only up to his thighs," Gilbert reassured.

"Help! Help!"

The floundering, rising, sinking man found his feet and stared helplessly, shame-facedly up at the agonized ladies. A man propelled a fishing boat near.

"Get in!" the fisherman called.

"Dear! He's got to get into that filthy boat!" one woman groaned.

"His suit! It's ruined! I know!" the other stormed.

Gilbert jerkily, angrily snatched his painting materials and made sudden, deliberate exit from the place of the vociferous and imperturable voices.

BOOK FOUR

RE-BORN TO BEAUTY

A LETTER

A letter can mean anything.

Destinies rock the world in letters. Fate breaks the thralldom of dynasties by letters. New eras dawn for all humanity in the guise of letters. Souls are re-born to hope and love in the advent of miraculous letters. Girls wake to chase futility; young men bestir themselves to wage astounding conquest of life; housewives throw away the last dime in the house; orphans become the children of a great Prince—all by letters.

In any letter there may be the voice of amazing, irrevocable destiny.

Into the tiny cottage on North Dock the postman dropped a letter.

Selma knew the handwriting well. Anxiously she tore it open and read the message, the kind and cruel message.

"My darling husband:

"I am writing you with conflicting emotions. Let me haste to confess that I love you and that love only prompts me to write. I blame myself as well as you for all that has happened.

"I just learned by accident the other day that you were in the neighborhood of Rockport, going under the name of Channing. A friend recognized your brush technique on a painting.

"However, I would love to see you again, if only for a short while. Selma can never love you as I love you—or quite understand you, perhaps, even though I have been such a fool—"

On and on Selma read, page after page, the feared, expected meaning of the letter becoming more apparent every moment in each new, urgent paragraph. Her first impulse, to destroy the letter, was swiftly checked by one strong, paralyzing realization.

This letter, perhaps only this letter, could save Gilbert and her baby—and everything.

She recalled instantly a conversation with Gilbert last week. It had stung her with whips of adder's tongue. Never would she be quite able to forget it.

"Evelyn will never divorce me. Divorce is against her principles. I know that. How can I have the face to start proceedings?"

After that carefully phrased outburst Selma knew that her child, her fat, pink Lyris was destined to become an outcaste; she could never hope to become Mrs. Gilbert Chalmers. Furthermore, did she really desire to become Mrs. Gilbert Chalmers?

Selma decided to keep the letter for a few days, to hide it, maybe to use it, maybe not. Anyhow, it was gratifying to know that Evelyn could write such a letter. And yet, how it hurt!

A week passed.

Gilbert came stomping in to supper one night without his picture. An uncommon occurrence. Angrily he threw his easel on the floor.

"What happened to your painting of East Gloucester Lighthouse? Didn't you go over this afternoon with Ned and Jim?" Selma questioned.

"Wasn't any good. Tore it up!" Gilbert snapped.

"Tore it up? Isn't that unusual?"

"Maybe it is. Anyway, what the hell!"

By the tone of voice Selma knew that conversation would not be desirable. She got busy making preparations for supper. Gilbert, flinging down his painting kit of ebony, pitched into her, the child, everybody.

"Yes, what the hell!" he exploded. "Nobody wants my work! Why paint? Who cares a damn whether I seek to create beauty for my day and generation or not? Who wants beauty these days, anyway? Who wants my things, I say? Who cares one good damn whether I paint or don't, whether I live or don't?" He threw himself on the studio couch, making a deafening clatter as its springs and the floor shivered.

"Evelyn does!" Selma had to fight to keep the flaming, outrushing conviction back. But she won the mastery. Finally Gilbert pressed his face to the wall and subsided. By the time supper was ready he was sound asleep. When she roused him he came shame-facedly to the table, ate sparingly of her frugal meal and soon left the shack.

He told a story at table that did not help ease her mind.

"I think a great deal these days about the man who tried to drown his troubles in drink only to find that they wouldn't sink!" Was Gilbert getting to a final end of dreams? There was a man once who got to such a place? Soon a rope dangled over a terrible field of blood and far away, over the hills, three crosses stood, bleak and awful, to the premature twilight.

Selma cleared off the table, put the baby to bed, drank again of the refreshment of a sun-filled yard of clothes, then stood in a window overlooking the wharves, watched the fishermen preparing for their night's vigil, because rain was falling, and studied a cluster of chugging fishing boats, motor-

driven, putting out to sea.

The smell of the docks was swept in upon her through the screen door by a rising wind. She stepped quickly to the door and shut it. She still heard dimly the whine of a retreating tide.

At the table she seated herself, her head fallen to her arms, curved beneath; she tried to find a way out of a trackless forest.

She roused, recovered a letter from its privacy and read each paragraph again by the flickering lamplight. The wick began smoking, filling the room with a nauseous odor. She turned the light down, then blew it out.

Why read the letter? She knew it, word by word.

Alone in the darkness the runaway girl, twenty-one, a mother, a sort of common law wife, thought of her life, her baby, and of another woman's avowal of love.

She thought of the land, of the hills, a glorious, sun-haloed back yard. She thought of rain-soaked wharves and highly colored guinea-boats a-swing at their moorings, forever and forever putting out to sea.

Grey-white gulls mewed plaintively by outside the windows. She held her head in her hands and tried to ward off a splitting headache.

She could not please Gilbert.

Her ways were not his ways. Her people were not his people. They had only one thing in common—the baby. Or perhaps two things. There was the colorful painting, the second one, above the bed, not yet framed.

Her head—the silken white hair of it falling aslant her arms and splashed on the blue oil-cloth of the table—her head grew heavy, the eyes rough, as though filled with sand.

The rain fell with vehemence now. Wind shook the black shack as though her dwelling were despicable, a fated thing

the gods tried to tear from the shore. One tremendous gust staggered up against and shook the shack and drove open the front door.

Selma awoke, startled, frightened.

What? A hurricane? Strange, then, that there were only casual onslaughts of wind. She was conscious only of laughter and guttural exclamations outside. Trembling, she reached for a match and lit the lamp. Its first brave flash of light disclosed the disturbance.

Gilbert lay in a heap on the studio floor, inside the door. Men had flung him in.

With a cry she bent to him and twined her arms about him. Her hands were wet. He was crying. No. It was blood. She rolled him over. An ugly gash over his left eye.

She tried to arouse him. He did not respond. She drenched him with a pitcherful of cold water. She rubbed his face, his hands, talking, pleading, praying. What had happened? She shook him madly.

Slowly he opened his filmy eyes and his thick, throaty voice drawled.

"'Ello, 'ello, 'ello. That you, Queenie? Did I come over to see you tonight? Sure I come. Why the 'ell shouldn't I? Ain't you all I got now?"

Selma shuddered as in the claw of the storm she thought imminent.

That reprehensible creature of the docks, the mark for the ribald jests of the sailors, the midde-age wastrels of the shore-line. Did he really know her? Could he talk thus familiarly of her, though in a drunken stupor? Had he been sinking like this, away from her, out of sight?

"What the devil! Might's well go one way as another! Nothin' to live for. Kicked me out of the church. Don't want my pitch-ers. Ain't even got a wife or kid of my own. Got

to go sometime, anyhow, ain't I—and all of us? Might's well go one way as another!

"Ain't that right, Queenie, old Codfish? You lost the breaks, too, didn't you? You know me. You understand, don't you? You can feel for me. You're better'n all them church folks, my wife and the Finn and all of 'em. You like the wharves, the docks and my things, don't you?"

Selma was glad Gilbert was not conscious and could not have a look at her face, the blinding, ungovernable flow of emotion, the fierce, passionate tremoring of her breast, the fiercely-driven hot blood that she knew must be making a queer sight out of her face.

"God!" she was saying to herself. "To think it would all come to this!"

She could think of nothing else to say. These words were whirled through her mind in burning, interminable monotone. Again and again they soughed through her reeling mind, like wind creaks through old, breaking canvas.

Her baby cried out—in her sleep. Then Lyris grew quiet again. Selma bent over the man who had slumped and looked at him.

She felt a horrid, inner repulsion against him, against herself, against everybody. Was this . . . her . . . work?

Why? How?

She had been infatuated with him. Once she had said she would give all to belong to a man with his dreams. Well, she had had her wish and given all, hadn't she?

She adored his art. She thrilled to hear him preach—once. But he no longer preached. His art was centered in smelly docks and smelly ships. And now—look at him—beard grown, face haggard, clothes muddied and a cloth wound about his forehead, blood-stains trickling through.

God! What this any fault of hers? Had she all too

lightly mentioned getting away from Hill Grove, when she should have remained to fight things out? Had she done Evelyn a great wrong when she spoke of divorce? Was it her fault because she felt herself irresistibly drawn to this young man among all men and boys?

Even the child had not saved him. Lyris, with her pink, soft chubbiness had not been able to bring the dawn back into Gilbert's greying countenance. There was a deep, vast, nameless sorrow, dragging him down. Only the letter came to her with any kind of a solution. But how its message had stung her! Still, she had kept it.

Selma, in the illumination of the lamp, stood as one impaled on a flame-eaten faggot.

What was he mumbling in his semi-conscious stupor? She listened, breathless.

"Go on and beat it, Queenie. It ain't love. Evelyn—she—she really loved me—once. She won't ever say so, but I know. Ma knows. Go on, old wench, I—"

Selma bent to Gilbert, pulled him into the bedroom, carefully removed his clothing, got him in bed, rebound his wound, heated him strong coffee on the stove, endeavored to rouse him, failed, then watched him slowly sinking into a sound, more natural slumber and was somewhat consoled.

THE NIGHT COMETH

Selma feasted her eyes on the picture above the bed. Again her glance roved from Gilbert's face to the sun-filled yard and back.

A spacious yard. Three long lines of clothes. Three hand-hewn clothespoles father had made. Father's chopping block, too; and the ax. In that yard she had peeled potatoes, scattered feed for the chickens; and in that yard she had become infatuated with the brilliant young pastor of Hill Grove Church. In that yard she, too, peeling a pail of potatoes had dared to dream.

While she stared at the resplendent yard, her mother moved heavily across it and clapped hands, calling her. Little sister sported with the dog. Father was splitting wood for the kitchen stove and getting kindling ready for the morning fire. Hens clucked in the bushes. How different their voices from the gulls!

"Going to paint my clothesline? The clothespoles and all? What do you see in a clothesline?"

"Wait and see."

Vivid, blinding images of yesterday cruelly invaded the shimmering present of today. Although the images hurt her, made her heart wince with longing, she allowed them to fascinate her. She didn't have the strength to resist their pressure or beauty. She was again looking up into the radiant

face of a clean-cut, tall, upstanding man, his wavy brown hair aglow with sunlight. She was again falling prey to a sun-splashed back yard where little Jan piled chicken crates, where Dagma hung out clothes and Elsa shelled beans, where Jack piled cord-wood and where her two older brothers had held wrestling matches. Both of the older boys, sailors, had not been heard from for years.

"That's the best picture you ever did—that I ever saw!" She was again drawing close to a finished oil painting, touching it, getting paint on an inquisitive finger.

"Look out! Don't spoil it!" He was scolding her again—playfully!

"Why should I? And to think my clothesline could look so pretty! You see things, don't you, that my mother and father don't see—or Lato! Gee!"

And yet, her father and mother had seen something, must have seen something valuable and worthwhile in that sun-filled back yard; they had stayed together there through the years, devoted and true; they had placed the clothesline and clothespoles there, the chopping block, the cord-wood. Hadn't they seen something which she and Gilbert had failed to see, something elemental, tremendously honorable and right? Had Gilbert said something to her once in that yard about getting her sharp, little bullet-eyes opened? Were they, at last, getting open?

Selma reached for the picture of the farm's backyard, removed the thumbtacks, held it in her hands. Then she placed it on the table, bent over the bed, kissed the sleeping man and child, smoothed the quilts about them and hitched over to the little boudoir table.

She lifted a letter, placed it in its envelope, laid it on the end-table which she moved beside the bed, close to the sleeping man's motionless hand. She studied again the two

figures in the one large bed.

He would discover the letter in the morning.

He would know that his wife loved him—how very much. Selma, a woman, knew that another woman, and only one, could help him now. Only one woman for this crisis; and her single leverage was a letter.

And there was a darling child to be considered.

Evelyn would love Lyriss and Lyriss would have an American name—Chalmers—and an opportunity in the world now. And Evelyn need never go through the agonies of child-birth. The chambermaid would take the travail for the Princess.

Evelyn was a worker, too, and could, without doubt, aided by well-to-do parents, get Gilbert back on his feet. The wharves would hold new meaning for him. He could win the world yet. The letter would speak for itself and tell him all these things.

She need write no letter.

The sea was always coming and going. The ships were always coming and going. In a few hours at most the sea would give up its dead, as Gilbert used to preach. Maybe he would think of his sermon. It would be, for him, a sort of Judgment Day.

She would go down to the ledges by the wharves and chat with a loitering sailor, so he could tell about everything in the day or two. She would make it apparent to all that it was a studied case of suicide.

Gilbert was an artist and a genius. In his mind dwelt wonderful ideas, thoughts, forms, colors, that once in a great while fairly took her breath away. Never would she quite possess him.

She had, in a measure, won and possessed him, his arms, the very life-blood of the one man in all the world she really desired to belong to. And she had lost him.

She should have known that from the first.

Had she been quite fair with everybody, with Evelyn? Perhaps not. But she had pitied Gilbert and had tried very hard to understand him. She had dared to hope that all would end right. But she had failed.

She had been frightened to observe his wonderful mind crumbling. It was dreadful, to see him come to the dead end of dreams.

Once, once he had painted a glorious thing. That belonged to her. He had promised to deed that to her some day. She would take it now. Wherever she went it must go. It would yield a subtle kind of comfort the next hard hour. Hill Grove would somehow be with her. She really wouldn't be out of her mother's back yard, or far from the delicious woodland sunlight.

She would be hanging clothes on the line or hurrying to take them in when it began to rain. She would be thinking about this when her own garments wrinkled up in the surf of Bass Rocks.

Suppose a little Finnish girl, a little fool, too, really comes to the very end of dreams? Who cares? She cannot ever paint. She never once preached.

She was born to work, to slave, to win a man, to bear children. What else is life? One must lie down in grass or fall into the sea, anyway, some time. Is it not better to select an appropriate time than wait dismally for dismal death?

All this raced through Selma's confused, frightened, deliberate mind as the kitchen clock gave promise of the dawn.

Again there was a reluctant tremor, a bending to the bed, and the free, generous bestowal of her heart's affection. Again she took notice of the letter in prominent display on the small mahogany table.

A man—a wife—and a child. Somehow the thought comforted her. With her out of the way everything would seem beautifully simple. Things would end—right.

What other man would interest her now, having belonged, if only for a season, to an American artist? Her fingers held a painting as though the single gift of the gods. This only was completely hers. This one thing in all the universe! Was it, really?

If so, it might go with her over the sea. If not, the waves would wash it back to the shore, perhaps to Gilbert's feet.

Once more the enclosing, suffocating walls of manifest destiny crumbled to an infant's voice. Lyris was crying.

Selma hurried to the bedroom and returned to the kitchen.

She stirred the fire, opened the oven door, drew the kitchen rocker close and busied herself endeavoring to quiet Lyris. Hungrily she offered her flesh to the oven's warmth and her heart to the conquest of her child's lonely, frightened cry.

What were the lines Gilbert loved to quote? They swept in upon her, almost shutting off her breath, oppressing heart, breast, throat.

"An infant crying in the night

An infant crying for the light

And with no language but a cry."

Never before had the warm, soft flesh of Lyris yielded such marvellous, irreplaceable delight. The quivering, life-throbbing body snuggled hungrily, utterly to her own. What dear, priceless freight for a lonely, despairing woman's arms!

Selma felt herself to be, rather than Lyris, the infant crying in the night.

How she craved the flashing of some small, friendly gleam of light! She envied the child, coveted its right to a mother's arms and was deluged with new, overbearing loneliness. Who could quiet her own love-starved heart and

bitterly incriminating conscience?

Who could hold her against an all-loving heart?

Up from the surging depths of her spirit came an old song, one she had sung to the restless Lyris, oh, so many times!

Once more she gave voice to a simple, tender little air of melody. With the music she endeavored to quell the torturous night, the chill November rain, the plaintive mewing of the gulls, the bitter onrushings of her burdened, pain-laden heart.

"Away in a manger
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down His sweet head."

For this moment the cruel tyranny of onrushing fate was stayed.

Only the song mattered, the pleasant warmth, the cheerful crackling of the cord-wood fire, the child of her flesh, the Child of the Song.

"The cattle are lowing
The baby awakes,
The little Lord Jesus,
No crying He makes."

That last line bequeathed a measure of peace to her spirit. Two and three times she repeated the line until, it seemed, the magic went out of it and the inner, stacked load made itself painfully present again.

"I love Thee, Lord Jesus,
Look down from the sky—"

A fresh, blinding flood, hot and blistering, played havoc with the song, her face, and swept down her face into her still singing lips.

"Oh, God," the poor girl groaned, rising, the baby falling

asleep in her arms. She walked about the room, going to one of the kitchen windows, and stared out into the windy, rain-soaked dark.

She knew it would be no use to finish the little song. No one would stand by her cradle till morning was nigh. No cradle anywhere for her laboring, storm-tossed spirit.

Standing by the dark window Selma pressed the little bundle of life to her tear-drenched countenance. She buried her face, her tears, her love, her dreams, everything, in that adorable tragic, magic little mound.

Rain broke its thousand brittle lances on the stubborn window panes. Wind whined its dirge down the small, resounding chimney.

Lyris slept.

Selma, with fierce, deliberate will, mastered this overwhelming flood, and, seized upon by a new, advancing strength, swept back into the bedroom, returned the inestimable heap of treasure into its place of rest, and, with prayers to God, to be kind to the child, for His Own Dear Sake, if not for her's, softly shut the bedroom door.

Only one who has walked Selma's road knows or can imagine what the quiet shutting of that door meant as the catch slowly slid into place.

Not only a door closed.

Life closed.

Selma turned down the kitchen lamp for a last time and blew it out. Noiselessly she slipped from the kitchen.

The front door was opened and shut. A small oil painting went with her.

Selma passed down the silent, black North Dock road. She passed, in a few minutes beneath a sputtering arc lamp, and returned the rough, coarse greeting of a fisherman in oilskins.

"Dirty night!" he growled. "Worst o' tha year!" He creaked heavily by.

"Yes, it is," came a voice from the moving figure in grey, clear and penetrating.

As the face turned upon the fisherman his eyes bulged.

"The saints preserve us!" he ejaculated, "a woman!", half to himself, then, full-voiced: "Dirty night to be about!"

He strained his eyes again toward the white, luminous face.

But the figure had vanished.

H O U R O F J U D G M E N T

A bit further on Selma passed beneath another huge arc lamp, the silver-white flame twisting and turning hard to keep alive in the wind. Looking down Selma felt her heart leap within her breast, the same instant.

"A mud puddle!" she exclaimed. "How entrancing it is!"

The silver-white globe of the lamp was mirrored in it; rain, falling, rippled its brief compass; her own dark, hooded figure loomed up out of it. A blotch of purple, also, that moment, rose out of it.

Selma glanced up.

A dark, ungainly figure was teetering, tottering along directly ahead of her, looming through the hurtling lances of rain, up through the black night splashed with gray and lavender shadows on the docks, among the scattered lamps.

Selma stared at the queer, amusing figure that went careening along upon the crooked dirt road beside the old, rickety wharves like an old vessel, no longer seaworthy, that, for a last time, struggles with a nor'easter.

Unmistakably Selma was observing the unbelievable antics of a woman. The very shape and motion of the body told her this—and the quality of the voice, if the voice could be said to have possessed such merit.

"Good-night, gen'men," the voice sang in a throaty, piercing falsetto, hiccupping the while. "I'm goin' ta leave ya

now. Merr-merrily, O merrily we'll roll along. Ouch! Blast that stone! Why inarnation don't they tend to these roads! O merr-merrily we'll—Ouch! They build these shacks clean onto the roads!"

The figure staggered against the corner of a shack and slumped onto the ground in a dark, dishevelled mass.

Strangely stirred Selma advanced, to give the woman a hand.

Who was this other forlorn creature of the night and the storm? What sister had the gods given her for this last, bitter hour?

Selma stretched a hand out.

"Come on, old lady, get up!" she urged. "'Here! I'll help you!"

The huddled creature moved.

"What! Help me up! Not by a kegful! Queenie ain't askin' no hand by no woman. D'ye hear?"

At that word Selma's blood froze, her hand was withdrawn, her fierce bullet-eyes alive with intense lights, pierced the fallen, moving thing through and through.

"So we meet again!"

For the moment everything was forgotten except this crisis.

"You're the scavenger of the docks, the breaker of homes. So you're the one that got Gilbert?"

"Gilbert? Gilbert?" the crawling, moving thing gulped. "Lemme see. Don't know as I remember. So many of 'em comes to Queenie. Who cares, anyhow? A jug of wine beneath the bow and thoul Hell! That would give me happiness enough! Heh! Is that the feller what taught me them lines? Is it?" She hurled it at the firm, motionless shadow that reared above her.

The loud, piercing voice might arouse the colony.

Of a sudden Selma reached out and down, two strong

hands of farm-work, grabbed the sputtering, strident crone and pulled her to her feet.

"Come with me!" the young, deliberate voice commanded.

"I ain't a-comin', ain't a-comin' with no woman. No, I ain't—"

Sputtering, scolding, cursing, the crone was driven along the road, beside the buildings, beside a wharf.

"I got a score to settle with you—for myself—for a heap of others. You've out-lived your time, old wench! You've blasted one soul too many! Down to your own place, old woman!"

There was a sudden, fierce thrust. A shadow tottered. A hideous scream. The shadow tumbled head-long into the water after clawing madly at a grimy old pier-head. A splash. A muffled oath. Again—silence, except for the spasmodic sougling of the wind and the incessant hum-drum of the relentless rain.

Selma hurried on through the chill, rain-drenched blackness, farther and farther from the circle of lights about the artist's colony and the fishermen's huts.

Remorse did not afflict her conscience. She only felt that she had made Rockport safer for Gilbert and a thousand more impressionable artists whose search for better things was too easily interrupted by parasitic, worthless objects. Perhaps this was her excuse for being. Anyway, she felt better inside of her. There were a score of women hereabout who would bless her—could they know.

Selma heard the crunching, oozing noise of her shoes along the rain-soaked road; she had to strain her eyes to make out the pale line of grey amid the dense darkness that outlined a road; nearer and nearer came the distant, dreadful drums of the sea on rampage.

She had some distance still to go.

Queenie passed almost at once from her thoughts as a worthless object that had dropped to oblivion. Still she felt the small painting leaning against her pulsating bosom, where she had fixed it before attending to the wench. It had slipped comfortably into place, above her heart; almost a child, it seemed, nestling to her breast; the sensation was not at all unpleasant.

Stepping along Selma bent her head down, to protect her face from the brutal onslaughts of the bitter-cold rain. Progress was becoming difficult. The rain, slowly turning to sleet, was covering the ground with a thin blanket of ice. By daylight the North Shore might be blanketed in snow-white woolens.

While she forced her sometimes slipping and spinning feet forward, her mind fought furiously to break the slender, fragile, but almost invincible filament of soul that, like a spider's filament of web seemed capable of limitless expanse without breaking, binding her heart to a little cottage and a sleep-quieted child.

Again and again she tried to convince herself that she had severed that filament-thread and she was now cast adrift, bereft of all obligations and loves and desires.

Again and again she became cruelly aware that that almost infinitesimal filament of love held her heart like an anchor to the past, to a cottage, a child and a destiny dreamed that would not, under any condition, suffer itself to be blotted out—from God's mind or from her's.

And yet, something was numbing mind and soul all the time. It was the dark, black, fateful aspect of everything, the visible world as also the invisible.

The shacks by the shore-line, the cottages in the town's center, the larger, more imposing structures on the heights—all were unlit, ghoulisn spectres that loomed, mute and unheeding, up through the storm-trampled night.

There was no moon for this hateful darkness; no diadem of stars for earth's garden of trees; no kind of gleam anywhere to break the certain, dread tyranny of despair that was, once more, rendering Selma's mind helpless, and whirling it about according to the wind's will.

"It is no use. There is no hope."

Everything screamed this at her—the wind and rain, the bleak, creaking limbs of trees, the unlit dwellings, the deserted, sleet-coated roads.

The roads now seemed to be neither freezing nor melting; a cold, starless, brittle stare of something neither this nor that; a helpless, meaningless coating that gave no promise of either spring or winter.

Up over a rise in the road she swept, her eyes discerning, a little space ahead, one thin, red flow of light into the homeless, lonely night. Gilbert often painted on vessels in moonlight scenes a tiny, cheering red light such as that.

But this could not be a vessel. It was a land light from a shack or cottage not far from the road or from the sea, about mid-way between road and surf.

AT SUNRISE EVERY SOUL

As Selma approached she kept her eye to the light.

It bequeathed a friendliness, a feeling of companionship. It stood for people out here where the elements held primeval carnival on this night. She came close to the dark silhouette that she knew symbolized a cottage.

In passing she came to a dead stop.

Just for a moment.

An infant cried.

Its thin, shrill voice, for the moment, vanquished the elements, overpowered rain and surf and sky. Out of the square, dark shadow lit by a friendly gleam came the cry of an infant. The voice was so like the voice of Lyriss!

For an instant she longed to go to the cottage, commit herself to the warm, crimson promises of the light, speak to people, hold the child. Only for an instant.

But a shadow passed against the light, she heard a man's voice, the child did not cry again, and Selma, heart not so brave, her feet having grown leaden, tramped up the bleak hillside toward Bass Rocks.

Into her line of vision loomed a seam of white, really grey, because there was no gleam of moon or star. A seam that thickened, separated, whirled and made a deafening din as she approached. She was near the Rocks.

One could not live long in that surf.

Her narrow, intense eyes scanned the whirling, churning mass. She thought of her mother churning butter for a moment. She laughed. What a queer thought to have at such a time!

She watched the long, heavy swells that came rushing in like black sea-monsters, rushing in madly along the rocks, smashing in among them, roaring, howling, thundering among them, grown white with rage and futile slaughter, flung resolutely back, one by one, back into the black, crawling sea; only to mass again and charge once more to certain, crumbling defeat.

Water and grass.

There it was again, the constant conflict of her own spirit. Which would win? Neither. Always there would be sea and land.

How futile of the waves to seek to engulf the earth! How futile of the rocks to think they could drive off the sea?

And, mingled with the deafening thunder of the breakers, mingled with the swish of the rain, the wild call of the gulls, the thumping of her heart against breast and temple, there was the cry of an "infant crying in the night."

"She is back there somewhere," she said to herself, glancing back up the hill, the summit of which she had just passed, thinking of a fisherman's nearby cottage and of another shack, quite some distance away.

Selma shuddered.

Strong, willful creature that she was, she had not anticipated the terror that now struck into her flesh and chilled her blood more than the rain. Nor had she planned the shake-up of a little voice so near the thunder-waves.

"I'll walk back to the cottage, just once, before I go", she decided.

The shining of a warm, crimson radiance, the voice of a

child, the silhouette of a man—these things might give her just the added strength she now felt she so vitally needed.

Confused, bewildered, her blood surging in her veins, like a raging sea, she started back up the hill, conscious that the rain had stopped, at once, completely, the wind had shifted, with a new coolness and that the darkness was not quite so impenetrable.

She could distinguish the circuitous strip of dirt road easier now.

Slowly she walked back.

Now look at the sky!

A pale, carmine lustre was working into it. Not a single flare from a fisherman's hut. A long, lengthening beam, almost resembling a clothespole, lying horizontal, tremorred on the skyline, slanting up all the time, lifting the sky up, up, up from the madly churning waters.

Rose petals, by some miracle of the gods, were being blown up against the grey, drab ceiling of the sky. Bits of sifted gold caught hold of the rose petals and illuminated them. Faint, tender patches of new green tremorred among them, like the spring's first show of grass.

Selma stood transfigured.

"B e a u t i f u l."

She spoke.

The word astonished her more than anything that had happened all night. What had she said? An artist's word? Had living with Gilbert done this to her?

Instantly a sentence of his rushed upon her from the past.

"It might take years to get your little bullet-eyes opened."

She had wondered if she could ever see beauty.

Thrilled, bathed in a sweet, delirious dawn-ecstasy, Selma drank in the shimmering, scintillating radiances of the magic hour and marvelled, watching the rose petals that were not

only blowing, gold-fringed, across the sky, but were now blowing across the sea.

Terror was now drowned, submerged, lost in a vast, breathless ecstasy.

"I, too, have seen beauty!"

No word was spoken, but with this amazing, overpowering conviction cannonading through her blood and flesh, Selma walked the rock-strewn hills, climbed along the narrow, glidery foot-paths and scrambled along the ledges, like artists, enamored by beauty, who seek a still lovelier vista in the opening panorama beyond.

She watched the crimson brightening to scarlet, the scarlet to orange, the orange yellowing, and the surf, so recently wild and frightening now shining with all the myriad brilliances of dawn-time.

Suddenly the orange-yellow lustre on the horizon glowed like a pot of new-burnished gold.

T h e S u n—

For an instant Selma thought that some superlative Painter had emptied his palette and flung all of its brilliant, astonishing colors on the sky, the clouds the sea.

"G O D !"

One word she breathed, her flesh tingling with a revelation so great, so terrible, so astounding, that she simply let herself go—go out to the winds, the clouds, the sunrise.

In wild delirium of rapture she shouted her glee to the wind-torn brine and scrambled up and down the miraculously brightening shore-line. She fell prey to a fascination, a witchery, a wonder that possessed and swayed her, rendering her a helpless, God-conquered thing. A sense of power mastered her that thrilled and frightened her at the same instant.

A tiny blot on the high-piled shore-line, the ageless resort of Nature's continuing Dinosauria—ledge and palisade, she

flung out her arms to the new-born day, drank deeply of the sea-salt air that became wine-sweet air in her lungs and knew uncontrollable joy.

The wind, smarting against her flesh, sent the blood in a new, onrushing tide through her veins; the whips of the wind stung the flesh of her face into unbelievable life; she felt her cheeks, lips, brow, chin quivering, throbbing, bursting with an undreamt vitality.

Tears, wetter than rain, stronger, more beautiful, made her face a shrine fit for the lingering presence of the steadily rising sun.

Tiny, infinitesimal blot on the awe-some ledges, she, nevertheless, knew a vaster, greater life than they could ever know. Her mind, flesh and spirit were thrilled to beauty and possessed by thoughts of God.

How long this experience lasted she did not know—or just when the cottage once more intrigued her fancy.

But, lost in the wonder, lore and sheer magic of a new day, Selma again turned back toward Rockport Colony.

Throw her life away?

Selma laughed in sheer exuberance of spirit at the ridiculous situation.

Then her face again saddened, but not as the sadness of the night.

LEAD KINDLY LIGHT

As Selma drew near the cottage on the slope she did not miss the lost radiance, so luminous were the skies. The now violent crying of an infant, however, stirred another pulse in her blood.

She noticed the cottage carefully as she approached its plain, drab, unpainted aspect, the black roof of many rain-warped shingles, the oversize chimney. It had a small yard but no clothesline or clothespole. And no grass. She observed these faults at once.

How much more homelike this desolate little plot of land would be with a good, stout clothesline and a patch of fresh, green grass.

Selma was now feeling cold, the exhilaration of the ledges having lost its keen edge. The sea-salt air made her aware that she was ravenously hungry.

Leisurely she came abreast of the cottage, some few feet down the incline, the front door facing the road, the back door facing the tide. That, however, pleased her. It fronted to the road.

Still the violent crying of a child.

Selma wondered what could be the matter, when the front door opened and a man's figure was thrust out.

Tall, bony, angular, his trousers wrinkled along bony shins, only a dirty white shirt covering his chest and waist.

His hair stuck out all over his head, reminding one that he had just risen. In rubber boots he tramped out into the yard, to a small shed, and filled his arms with cord-wood, cut into small lengths.

Returning to the house he noticed the woman on the road. Selma knew he did, the way he acted. The man disappeared inside the door. A girl emerged.

"Hey, lady."

A girl's high-pitched, eager voice penetrated the sunrise.

"Lookin' fer somebody? This is the last place on the road. Ain't lookin' fer Mike's place, be ya?"

Selma thought the girl seemed shabby, rangy, her face pale and haggard. She was interested in the thick, luxuriant dark hair that framed the large head and wrinkled loosely around the shoulders.

"No thanks. Just out for a walk."

"A walk? This time of day? Why, it's only sun-up. I just thought you might be lookin' fer somebody."

The girl turned back into the house.

Selma ventured another dozen steps along the road.

The vociferous crying of the child increased.

Again the door was flung open and the man's voice, this time, accosted her.

"Say, lady, do ya know how to quiet a teethin' young un? Jeannie and me's done everythin'. What would ya do?"

"You two alone?" Selma turned back up the sloping road.

"Yep. Bin alone fer six months, since my woman went away. Just Jeannie and me. P'r'aps ya can tell us how to quiet the kid. He ain't so bad, but some nights Jeannie and me can't get a snooze in edgeways. It's pretty bad, sure it is!"

Selma stood on the road, the cottage down the incline, reached by a twisting rocky path. Should she go down?

Something in the girl's face, in the man's voice, or in the crying of the child the girl had brought to the door and vainly tried to comfort—something irresistible impelled her woman's heart, then her feet, to the half open cottage door.

"Let me take him," she said.

Selma handed over a painting, the back of it to the strangers, to the girl, as she gathered the infant into her arms.

"It's a boy, of course," she went on, offering her strong, eager, woman's arms to the child. It did not cringe or hold back, but gave itself instantly to the tender warmth and firm pressure of the enfolding arms.

The man stared curiously at the new comer. The girl found voice.

"Goes to ya like he allus knew ya."

Selma felt a delicious joy suffusing her as the little, living thing burrowed into her arms, pressed its face against her warm, throbbing breast and slowly diminished its fierce crying.

"It's great how a kid will go fer a woman ev'ry time!" the man declared, observing the miracle. "'Twas just the same when Mary was here. Kids allus took to her, never to me."

"But, Pop, ya're away to sea an awful lot. Kids don't get to know ya real well. That's what Mum allus said."

Selma, for the first time in her life, was cognizant of a quiet, wistful beauty in the trustful, devout eyes of a girl. She had never noticed this sort of thing before.

"Reckon ya're right," the man added. "Still, takin' account of all things, I kinder like kids, meself. Allus did." And in the voice of this crude fellow there was something fascinating.

Selma inquired if the child's bottle was on the stove, warming.

"Yep. But he won't take it. Upsets him some. Mary

allus nursed him. But, ya see, she's gone."

"Left you?"

"Yep. Fer good an' all. Berried her six months ago. Real fine woman, too. Prayed, read the Good Book." The man, talking, received a nudge from the girl. She motioned him to bend his head down. She whispered in his ear.

"Sure enough!" the man ejaculated. "Excuse me fer not askin' ye sooner, lady. But have ye bin to breakfast? Jeannie and me was just gettin' some bacon and eggs together. Got some real fresh eggs in town yestiddy. Jeannie ain't no hand much to fry 'em. If ya can cook, if ya can fry bacon and eggs like ya can stop Jim from squallin', wall, I'd say ya was what my Mary would call—a godsend!"

Selma liked this man, his frank manner, friendly ways and resonant voice. Shaved, cleaned up, he would be a good-looking fellow. The girl, too, had possibilities, with those mild, soulful eyes, the luxuriant hair and the kind face. Cook breakfast? Why not?

Selma found a tablecloth for the kitchen table and, aided by the girl, scoured the dishes. Then she prepared the bacon and eggs, set the table, found old napkins in a drawer and made the coffee.

Selma had placed her picture on the mantelpiece, having cleared a place for it, the face of the painting toward the wall.

Around the breakfast table acquaintanceship was begun in earnest.

"Ain't never seed ya about before, lady."

"No. I've only been staying here a short while."

"Like it hereabouts?"

"Yes, I believe I do."

"Then you ain't quite sartin'?"

"Not exactly. This is, however, the most interesting place I've found along the shore yet. I thought I never could

get used to the sea, the breakers, the ships and the gulls. Maybe I could—in a measure—after a while."

"Be ya married?"

It was a sudden, sharp, tremendous question. The man glanced at the girl; the girl smiled at the man. He went on.

"We really need a woman about the place. Ya wouldn't like to make ya're home here, would ya, by any chance? 'Course the place ain't much and we can't pay much, but there is Jim and Jeannie and me. And Mary allus said it could be fixed up real pretty-like."

"I have a little girl of my own," Selma owned.

"That's why Jim went to ya the way hé did. 'Cause he knew ya was a mother. Then, ya're alone in the world, too, like Jeannie and me?"

Little brilliant radiances, like those Selma had witnessed on the sunrise-surf, were glowing from the man's eyes. The girl started to cry, broke down completely, slid from her chair and raced out doors. Selma stared confusedly at the man.

"She'll fetch up all right in a jiffy. Jeannie was allus tender-hearted like that. A likely young un, though. Bin hard on her, rearin' the baby and a-tryin' to keep things on an even keel. But she's a real skipper, yes, ma'am, and you'll take to her. And she likes ye a-ready. I know that. Yep, I know it.

"Ef ya got a young un of yer own, fetch her along. One more won't 'mount to nothin'. I'll get enough fer ya all to eat and ya wages beside. And p'r'aps—p'r'aps in time ya'll like the place enough to want to stay allus here.

"Even that, lady, I think, in time, could be taken care of. Jeannie needs a good mother to fetch her up these days. Bin thinkin' the last hour that maybe ya was the godsend my Mary said would come to us some day. Said she was sartin God would send us somebody to help take care of Jim and Jeannie and me."

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

M a r r i a g e.

Selma listened spell-bound to this crude, genial fellow, probably some ten years older, but with the quiet, friendly eyes and the reassuring voice.

His frankness, his sincerity thrilled her. Above all, his faith in her, opening home and heart to her and Lyris; his honest, unashamed appeal for companionship. She knew she would love the sweet, undernourished girl. The man was of her class—not a genius; just a hard-working man of the sea.

Resolutely she rose from the table and advanced to the mantelpiece. She turned the painting over.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Wall. I'll be, lady! Ef it ain't a pitcher of a clothesline and clothes hangin' on it. Whar'd ya get that?"

"Maybe I'll tell you sometime. But look! See that nice, clean clothesline?"

" 'Course I do."

"Got any clothespoles about?"

"Nope. Used a pair of old oars."

"Could you make some good clothespoles?"

"Sure. Easy as a wink."

"See the grass in the picture— fresh, bright grass?" She pointed it out.

" 'Course I do, lady."

"Suppose we could get some fertilizer and grass seed in the spring and sow it in the yard?"

"Don't see why not."

"Then—I'll stay!"

"Lady, thank God! Thank God! My Mary's prayers is answered! Wait! I'll go call Jeannie. Reckon her prayers is answered, too. Thank God! Thank God!"

The man lunged through the door. Selma burst into tears. She made no effort to control them. She let them flow.

Later, a half hour or so, Selma said she would like to go to Rockport and get her child and her things.

"All right, lady. I'll get Charlie and have him fetch his old car."

The fisherman legged it across the road and started down the hill.

"I'm so glad ya come along this way this mornin'," the girl confessed, smiling, taking hold of Selma's two hands, binding them about her neck. "Only last night I asked God to send me a new mother, like my real mother. Then, last night, I had a terrible dream. I can't think of it now. But I woke up so scared."

While Jeannie talked an old car chugged up the road and stopped in front of the house, opposite the entrance.

"Charlie, he'll fetch ya to town and back. I'll fix the price with 'im. We'll be expectin' ya back soon—and the young un."

"I'll be back."

The man and the girl waved goodbye as the old car rattled down the stony, winding road. The girl kept waving until but a blot upon the horizon.

"Nice mornin', after the rain," the driver ventured.

"Just perfect," Selma answered, her eye upon a creamy tuft of sail that loomed like an angel's wing against the sparkling blue skyline.

"Maybe I do like the water," she said softly. "I think I do. I guess I'm getting my eyes opened."

It was a short drive to the artist colony.

Approaching North Dock Road Charlie spoke excitedly.

"Look ahead, lady. Somethin's afoot. Look at that mob, will ya? Wonder what's in the wind. Somebody hurt er somethin'. Got the ambulance there."

A dense multitude filled the road and thronged the road at this early hour.

"Want to stop and see what's doin'?" Charlie suggested. "Ain't never seed a mob like that around these parts."

"No, thanks. I'm in a hurry and my feet are very cold."

"We could git down, lady, move about a mite in the mob. That ud limber up them feet o' yourn."

"I can't spare the time."

"Can't spare the time?" Charlie echoed. "Ya ain't in such an all-fired hurry to git back to Tom and Jeannie, be ya? Honest, lady, that ain't no ordinary mob. Maybe bin a fight er somethin'. Maybe somebody got killed."

Charlie eased up on the gas. Selma reached forward from the back seat and her words were clear, sharp, decisive.

"I promised to get right back, and I shall keep my word."

Mumbling, scolding, Charlie circled around and detoured the crowd, taking the next road to the left.

"Cold feet," she heard Charlie mutter. "Warm 'em up movin' around. Gad! Somethin' big goin' on."

"What time is it?" Selma inquired when the chugging old automobile stopped in front of her shack.

Charlie hauled out an ancient timepiece.

"Eight-twelve."

Selma hastened inside the house.

Lyris was playing with sheets of paper in the middle of the bed. Gilbert slept heavily.

"Heavens, child!" she exclaimed, snatching the baby from the bed, returning the pages to an envelope and placing it back on the end table.

Swiftly she gathered Lyris' clothes together and the things she desired to carry with her from the old life to the new. She piled them in the back seat of the waiting car.

She thrust Lyris into Charlie's awkward hands and swept, for a last time, into the shack, past the exhibit of paintings, to the kitchen table. She glanced about the room. She noticed the lamp chimney. It needed cleaning. She rummaged a pencil from one window sill and scribbled a note.

"Dearest Gilbert:

"I am leaving you—for good and all. Do not try to follow me. The accounts are even. Evelyn's letter will explain matters. Go to her. She loves you very much. I am sure she does. I have misjudged her. I am terribly sorry. You can stage a brilliant come-back. I know. I shall always remember things—and pray for you—and for all of us. Your faith has been rewarded in me. The little bullet eyes have got opened. I, too, have seen—Beauty.

"God bless, you—

Selma."

Yes, why not write that last benediction? Often he had spoken those words to her, years ago, when he first ministered to her in Hill Grove. And there was no insincerity in her heart as she scribbled the farewell.

A last, long, intense look. A swift, utter kiss on his right cheek, below the bandage.

For a last time she let her fingers slip quietly and tenderly over his bandaged head and move appreciatively through the thick, black hair above it. Always a pleasurable custom of hers. Still his luxuriant, attractive hair was unchanged.

The front door was softly shut again.

As the car rattled down North Dock Road Charlie had to swing fiercely on the wheel to avoid colliding with a handsome new-model limousine that nosed around a corner.

Selma swept a look into the back seat of it. She knew the woman's face instantly, though the glance of recognition was not returned.

It was—Evelyn.

As the old Model-T went perambulating up the grassy, rockstrewn slopes toward Bass Rocks, Selma, her baby in her lap, let herself go again—out to the clear, cobalt skies, to the white, wind-blown clouds like scudding ships at full-sail before the wind, to the thrilling ecstasy of the clean, sweet air and the blue, salt sea.

Again a sentence from out the past swept in and out of mind like wind plays among the freshening billows.

"There's beauty everywhere, but one must have eyes to see."

Selma laughed long and noisily—but who could blame her?—as she held her baby dreaming of clotheslines and grass. And then, too, just think of this:

Perhaps the world had been waiting for her to be born, in order to have one fact decently proved.

A woman can have a nice, stout clothesline and new, bright, upspringing green grass even though she is forced to live in a shack by the sea.

And she might have a wedding ring, too—if she really wanted one. Why couldn't she?

Never perhaps in all the world had a fisherman's shack, slowly coming into view, offered such rich treasure to a hungry woman's heart.

Yes, indeed, as for us all—dreams end—and dreams begin.

IF DREAMS YOU FOLLOW

If dreams you follow, clothe yourself for desert,
Make your feet hard, to climb and journey far;
Toughen your hands to grapple thorn and nettle
And learn to reckon distance by a star;
The city's lamps must perish from your vision,
You must spend nights where winds and vultures are!

Blame not if crowds soon ridicule your dreaming
Or sweet-lipped maiden weeps that you are wrong;
Dreams heaven-bright are always more alluring
Than bridal-day or flower-festooned throng;
At dawn you could not bear the drunken stupor
That others wallow in, who quenched God's song!

Who follows dreams must find them all-sufficient
And barter not one dream for house or shed;
Warmer the soul that with white dreams is laden
Than flesh wrapped in new furs from foot to head;
A richer feast a saint has found in berries
Than where sick courtiers faint by tables spread.

Is it not quite enough God walks in deserts
And chances down a twisted, tortured road?
Did not one Prophet from a vine-walled village
Find better friends where one bleak river flowed?
Shoved out of cities, hanging on Rome's gibbet,
Was heaven not nearer than in youth's abode?

If dreams you follow, they, alone, are master;
Not wife or comrade, magistrate or kin;
Trees are your tents, their canopies your shelter;
Your psalm perhaps only the sea's white din;
But God shall dine with you in cave or desert
And sky bend down to let your soul come in!



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